Mr. Punch's Dramatic Sequels

St. John Hankin

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MR. PUNCH'S
DRAMATIC SEQUELS.

MR. PUNCH'S DRAMATIC SEQUELS.

BY

ST. JOHN HANKIN.

WITH FOURTEEN ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS BY

E. J. WHEELER.

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PREFATORY.

Plays end too soon. They never show
The whole of what I want to know.

The curtain falls and I'm perplexed
With doubts about what happened next.

Did HAMLET'S *father haunt no more*
The battlements of Elsinore?

Does LADY TEAZLE *never call*
At LADY SNEERWELL'S *now at all?*

Was BENEDICK'S *a happy marriage?*
And will the MELNOTTES *keep a carriage?*

Will AUBREY *take to wife one day*
Another MRS. TANQUERAY?

Do ECCLES *and his stepson wrangle?*
Has anything been heard of DANGLE?
What has become of MRS. WANGEL?

I've asked again and yet again
These questions—hitherto in vain!

I sought the answers near and far.
At length they came, and here they are:—

Alcestis.

How Admetus was saved from the disagreeable necessity of dying by his wife Alcestis, who was permitted to die in his stead, and how Heracles, in gratitude for Admetus' hospitality, wrestled with Death for her and restored her to her husband, has been narrated by Euripides. What Euripides did not *do was to give us any hint of the subsequent history of the reunited couple. Did they live happily ever afterwards, or——? But the sequel must show. It is written in the woman-hating vein so often seen in Euripides, and its title has been Latinized for the benefit of those who have forgotten their Greek.*

HERCULES VICTUS.

SCENE.—*Before* ADMETUS' *Palace. That worthy enters hurriedly through the Royal doors, which he bangs behind him with a slight want of dignity. He soliloquises.*

ADMETUS.

Ye gods, how long must I endure all this,
The ceaseless clamour of a woman's tongue?
Was it for this ye granted me the boon
That she might give her life in place of mine,
Only that Heracles might bring her back,
Torn from the arms of Death to plague me thus?
This was your boon, in sooth no boon to me.
How blind is man, not knowing when he is blest!
Fool that I was, I mourned Alcestis' death
Almost as much as I should mourn my own.
Indeed I thought, so great my grief appeared,
I would almost have laid my own life down
—Almost I say—to bring her back to earth.
Yet, now she lives once more she makes me weep

More bitter tears than I did ever shed
When I believed her gone beyond recall.

[*Weeps bitterly.*

CHORUS.

FIRST SEMICHORUS.

Oh, what a doubtful blessing is a wife
Who saves your life
And then doth make it doubly hard to live!
Alas, she doth but give
A gift we cannot prize
But count it in our eyes
As nothing worth—a thing to spurn, to cast away,
To form the theme of this depreciatory lay!

SECOND SEMICHORUS.

Alcestis, what a shame it is to find
This kingly mind
So much disturbed, this kingly heart so wrung,
By thy too active tongue
Thou gav'st thy life for his
But oh, how wrong it is
To make that life which thou so nobly didst restore
A thing he values not at all, in fact a bore!

FIRST SEMICHORUS.

O wretched race of men,
When shall we see again
The peace that once ye had
Ere woman bad,
Or mad,
Did cross your happy path
In wrath,
And doom you to a tedious life of fear and fret,
Of unavailing tears and unconcealed regret!

SECOND SEMICHORUS.

O Heracles, what shame
Shall cloud thy previous fame
Who brought this lady back
Along the black
Steep track,
Where Death and she did fare,
A pair
(At least, as far as we can ascertain) content
To those Tartarean halls which hear no argument!

[*Enter* ALCESTIS. *She is in a bad temper, and is weeping as only Euripides' characters can.*

ALCESTIS.

Ah! woe is me! Why was I ever born?
And why, once dead, did I return again
To this distressful earth? Oh, Heracles,
Why did you bear me back to this sad place,
This palace where Admetus sits enthroned?
Oh, what a disagreeable fate it is
To live with such a husband—hear his voice
Raised ever in complaint, and have no word
Of gratitude for all I did for him!
Was there another creature in the world
Who willingly would die for such a man?
Not one! His father, aged though he was,
Scouted the proposition as absurd.
His mother, when approached, declined in terms
Which I should hesitate to reproduce,
So frank and so unflattering they were.
But I, I gave my life instead of his,
And what is my reward? A few cold words
Of thanks, a complimentary phrase or two,
And then he drops the subject, thinks no more
About the matter and is quite annoyed
When, as may happen once or twice a day,
I accidentally allude to it!

"His father, aged though he was,
Scouted the proposition as absurd."

ADMETUS.

[*Bursting into indignant stichomuthia.*] Not once or twice but fifty times a day.

ALCESTIS.

Nay, you can't have too much of a good thing.

ADMETUS.

I don't agree. Speech is a good to men. . . . .

ALCESTIS.

Your drift, as yet, I do not well perceive.

ADMETUS.

. . . . Yet too much speech is an undoubted ill.

ALCESTIS.

Ah, you rail ever at a woman's tongue.

ADMETUS.

Where the cap fits, why, let it there be worn.

ALCESTIS.

You spoke not thus when I redeemed your life.

ADMETUS.

No, for I thought you gone ne'er to return.

ALCESTIS.

'Twas not of mine own will that I came back.

ADMETUS.

I'm very certain that 'twas not of mine!

ALCESTIS.

Tell that to Heracles who rescued me.

ADMETUS.

I will, next time he comes to stay with us.

ALCESTIS.

You say that, knowing that he cannot come.

ADMETUS.

Why should he not? What keeps him then away?

ALCESTIS.

Cleansing Augean stables: a good work!

ADMETUS.

Idiot! He never will let well alone.

ALCESTIS.

[*Tired of only getting in one line at a time.*] Iou! Iou!
What thankless things are men!

And, most of all, how thankless husbands are!
We cook their dinners, sew their buttons on,
And even on occasion darn their socks,
And they repay us thus! But see where comes
Great Heracles himself. 'Tis ever thus
With heroes. Mention them, and they appear.

[*Enter* HERACLES *in the opportune manner customary in Greek tragedy.*

HERACLES.

[*Preparing to salute the gods at great length.*] Great Zeus, and thou, Apollo, and thou too——

ADMETUS.

[*Interrupting hurriedly.*] Oh, Heracles, you come in fitting time
To this afflicted and much suffering house.

HERACLES.

Wherefore afflicted? Anybody dead?

ADMETUS.

Not dead, but living. That the grievance is.

HERACLES.

A plague on riddles! Make your meaning clear.

ADMETUS.

Six months, six little months, six drops of time!

HERACLES.

You still remain unwontedly obscure.

ADMETUS.

Six months ago you tore my wife from Death.

HERACLES.

Well, what of that? What's all the fuss about?

ADMETUS.

I know you did it, meaning to be kind,
But, oh, it was a terrible mistake.
Indeed, I think it positively wrong
That you should interfere with Nature's laws
In this extremely inconsiderate way.
Depend upon it when a lady dies
It's most unwise to call her back again.
You should have left Alcestis to the shades
And me to live a happy widower.

HERACLES.

Ungrateful man, what words are these you speak?
Were you not glad when I did bring her back?

ADMETUS.

I *was*. But that was several months ago.
And in the interval I have found cause,
A dozen times a day, to change my mind.

HERACLES.

What cause so strong that you should wish her dead?

ADMETUS.

Well, if you must be told, she's sadly changed;
Dying has not at all agreed with her.
Before Death took her she was kind and mild,
As good a wife as any man could wish,
How altered is her disposition now!
She scolds the servants, sends away the cook,
—A man I've had in my employ for years—
And actually criticises ME!

HERACLES.

I'm really very much distressed to hear
This mournful news. But what am I to do?

ADMETUS.

Make Death receive her back: an easy task.

HERACLES.

But will Alcestis see it, do you think?

ALCESTIS.

Please, don't distress yourself on *her* account;
She'd leave her husband upon *any* terms.
Is there a woman in the whole wide world
That would not rather die a dozen times
Rather than live her life out with this man,
This puling, miserable, craven thing,
Who lets his wife lay down her life for him
And, when by miracle she is restored
To earth again and claims his gratitude,
Has the bad taste to grumble at the fact?

ADMETUS.

I told you, Heracles, she had a tongue.

HERACLES.

Indeed, she's well equipped in that respect.

ALCESTIS.

To such a man the stones themselves would speak.

HERACLES.

Well, lady, are you then content to die?

ALCESTIS.

I'm positively anxious to be off.

HERACLES.

Then will I go and make Death take you hence.

ALCESTIS.

I'm sure I shall be very much obliged.

ADMETUS.

But, oh! not half so much obliged as I.

HERACLES.

So be it, then. Death won't be far away.
And when I've found him and have punched his head,
I'll make him come and take you off at once.

[*Exit* HERACLES.

The Chorus, who appear to have borrowed their metre from "Atalanta in Calydon," sing as follows:—

CHORUS.

Is this really to put
An end to our cares,
To the toils where our foot
Was caught unawares?

Will Heracles really put straight this unfortunate state of affairs?

Will he overthrow Death
For the second time here?
Will he do as he saith
And in due time appear
With the news which will lay fair Alcestis a second time out on her bier?

She will die, she proclaims,
With the utmost good-will,
And she calls us all names
In a voice that is shrill
While she vows that the sight of Admetus, her husband, is making her ill!

It hardly seems wise
To spurn and reject
Your husband with cries—
To which all men object,
But Admetus is scarcely the husband to inspire any wife with respect.

Lo, Heracles comes,
A hero confessed!
But he twiddles his thumbs
And looks somewhat depressed.
Can it be that at last he's been conquered? Well, all I can say is, I'm blest!

[*The Chorus sit down in dejection.*

Enter HERACLES.

HERACLES.

First I salute the gods, great Zeus in chief . . . .

ADMETUS.

[*Interrupting.*] Oh, skip all that. Tell us about the fight.

HERACLES.

Iou! Iou!

ADMETUS.

Don't yap like that. Speak up. What is your news?

HERACLES.

My friends, I saw Death slinking down the drive.
I stopped him, told him that this lady here
Was anxious for his escort to the Shades,
Reminded him that I had once before
Rescued her from his grasp, and pointed out
How generous I was thus to restore
What then I took. In fact, I put the best
Complexion on the matter that I could.

ALCESTIS.

Well? Did he say that he would take me back?

HERACLES.

By no means. He declined emphatically.
He will not take you upon any terms.
Death is no fool; he knows what he's about!

ADMETUS.

But did you not compel him to consent?

HERACLES.

I did my best. We had a bout or two
Of wrestling, but he threw me every time.
Finally, out of breath, and sadly mauled,
I ran away—and here I am, in fact.

ALCESTIS.

You stupid, clumsy, fat, degenerate lout,
I positively hate the sight of you!
Out of my way, or I shall scratch your face!
If Dejanira feels at all like me,
She'll borrow Nessus' shirt and make you smart!

[*Exit angrily.*

HERACLES.

Oh, what a vixen! Can you wonder Death,
When I approached him, would not take her back?

ADMETUS.

I can't pretend I'm very much surprised
Although, if you will pardon the remark,
I think you might have made a better fight.
Better not stay to dine. It's hardly safe.
Alcestis isn't to be trifled with,
And if she murdered you *I* should be blamed!

[*Exit sorrowfully.*

CHORUS.

[*Rising fussily.*] How ill-natured of Death!
What a horrible thing!
It quite takes my breath
And I pant as I sing.
If Alcestis is really immortal, what a terrible blow for the King!

Curtain.

Hamlet.

Among the plays which seem specially to require a sequel, "Hamlet" must certainly be reckoned. The end of Act V. left the distracted kingdom of Denmark bereft alike of King, Queen, and Heir-Presumptive. There were thus all the materials for an acute political crisis. It might have been imagined that the crown would fall inevitably to the Norwegian Prince Fortinbras who, being on the spot with an army behind him, certainly seems to have neglected his chances. It is clear, however, from the sequel that Fortinbras failed to rise to the occasion, and that Horatio, being more an antique Roman than a Dane, seized his opportunity and by a coup d'état *got possession of the vacant throne. Nor would Fortinbras appear to have resented this, as we find him subsequently visiting Horatio at Elsinore. There is, however, a Nemesis which waits upon Usurpers, as the sequel shows. The sequel, by the way, should have been called "Ghosts," but that title has been already appropriated by a lesser dramatist.*

THE NEW WING AT ELSINORE.

SCENE I.—*The Platform before the old part of the Castle as in Act I.* HORATIO *and* FORTINBRAS *come out of the house swathed in overcoats, the former looking nervously over his shoulder. It is a dark winter's evening after dinner.*

FORTINBRAS.

[*Shivering slightly.*] 'Tis bitter cold——

HORATIO.

[*Impatiently.*] And you are sick at heart.
I know.

FORTINBRAS.

[*Apologetically.*] The fact is, when I get a cold
I often can't get rid of it for weeks.
I really think we may as well stay in.

HORATIO.

[*Doggedly.*] I'm sorry, but I can't agree with you.
I shall sit here.

[*Sits down resolutely with his back to the castle.*

FORTINBRAS.

[*Turning up his coat collar resignedly.*] It's perfect rot,
you know,
To let yourself be frightened by a Ghost!

HORATIO.

[*Angrily.*] A Ghost! You're always so inaccurate!
Nobody minds a spectre at the feast
Less than Horatio, but a dozen spectres,
All sitting round your hospitable board
And clamouring for dinner, are a sight
No one can bear with equanimity.
Of course, I know it's different for you.
You don't believe in ghosts! . . . . Ugh, what was that?

FORTINBRAS.

Nothing.

HORATIO.

I'm sure I saw a figure moving there.

FORTINBRAS.

Absurd! It's far too dark to *see* at all.
[*Argumentatively.*] After all, what *are* ghosts?
In the most high and palmy state of Rome
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
People saw *hoards* of them! Just ring for lights,

And let us make ourselves as comfortable
As this inclement atmosphere permits.

HORATIO.

[*Despondently.*] I'd ring with pleasure, if I thought the bell
Had any prospect of being answered.
But as there's not a servant in the house——

FORTINBRAS.

[*Annoyed.*] *No* servants?

HORATIO.

[*Bitterly.*] As my genial friend, Macbeth,
Would probably have put it, "Not a maid
Is left this vault to brag of." In other words,
They left *en masse* this morning.

FORTINBRAS.

Dash it all!
Something is rotten in the state of Denmark
When you, its reigning monarch, cannot keep
Your servants for a week.

HORATIO.

[*Sadly.*] Ah, Fortinbras,
If you inhabited a haunted castle

You'd find *your* servants would give warning too.
It's not as if we only had *one* ghost.
They simply *swarm!* [*Ticking them off on his fingers.*]
There's Hamlet's father.
He walks the battlements from ten to five.
You'll see him here in half an hour or so.
Claudius, the late King, haunts the State apartments,
The Queen the keep, Ophelia the moat,
And Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the hall.
Polonius you will usually find
Behind the arras murmuring platitudes,
And Hamlet stalking in the corridors.
Alas, poor ghost! his fatal indecision
Pursues him still. He can't make up his mind
Which rooms to *take*—you're never safe from *him!*

FORTINBRAS.

But why object to meeting Hamlet's Ghost?
I've heard he was a most accomplished Prince,
A trifle fat and scant of breath, perhaps;
But then a disembodied Hamlet
Would doubtless show a gratifying change
In that respect.

HORATIO.

[*Irritably.*] I tell you, Fortinbras,
It's not at all a theme for joking.

"And Hamlet stalking in the corridors."

However, when the New Wing's finished
I shall move in, and all the ghosts in limbo
May settle here as far as I'm concerned.

FORTINBRAS.

When will that be?

HORATIO.

The architect declares
He'll have the roof on by the end of March.

FORTINBRAS.

[*Rising briskly.*] It is a nipping and an eager air.
Suppose we stroll and see it?

HORATIO.

[*Rising also.*] With all my heart.
Indeed, I think we'd better go at once.
[*Looks at watch.*
The Ghost of Hamlet's father's almost due.
His morbid love of punctuality
Makes him arrive upon the stroke of ten,
And as the castle clock is always fast
He's rather apt to be before his time.

[*The clock begins to strike as they exeunt hastily. On the last stroke,* GHOST *enters.*

GHOST.

I am Hamlet's father's spirit,
Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day . . . . [*Stops, seeing no one there.*
What! Nobody about?
Why, this is positively disrespectful.
I'll wait until Horatio returns
And, when I've got him quietly alone,
I will a tale unfold will make him jump!
[*Sits down resolutely to wait for* HORATIO.

SCENE II.—*Before the New Wing of the Castle. The two Clowns, formerly grave-diggers but now employed with equal appropriateness as builders, are working on the structure in the extremely leisurely fashion to be expected of artizans who are not members of a Trades Union.*

1ST CLOWN.

[*In his best Elizabethan manner.*] Nay, but hear you, goodman builder——

2ND CLOWN.

[*In homely vernacular.*] Look here, Bill, you can drop that jargon. There's no one here but ourselves, and I ain't amused by it. It's all very well to try it on when

there's gentlefolk about, but when we're alone you take a rest.

1ST CLOWN.

[*Puzzled.*] Ay, marry!

2ND CLOWN.

[*Throwing down tools.*] Stow it, I say, or I'll have to make you. Marry, indeed! If you mean "Yes," say "Yes." If you mean "No," say "No."

1ST CLOWN.

All right, mate.

2ND CLOWN.

[*Grumbling.*] It's bad enough staying up all night building more rooms on to this confounded castle—I should have thought it was big enough and ugly enough without *our* additions—but if I'm to listen to *your* gab, s'help me——!

1ST CLOWN.

Hush! here comes some one.

[*They make a valiant pretence of work as* HORATIO *and* FORTINBRAS *enter.*

HORATIO.

[*Ecstatically, completely deceived by this simple ruse.*] *My* Master-Builders!

FORTINBRAS.

Idle dogs!

1ST CLOWN.

[*Elizabethan again.*] Argal, goodman builder, will he nill he, he that builds not ill builds well, and he that builds not well builds ill. Therefore, perpend!

HORATIO.

[*Appreciatively.*] How absolute the knave is!

FORTINBRAS.

He seems to me to be an absolute fool.

HORATIO.

Not at all. A most intelligent working man. I'll draw him out. [*To* 1ST CLOWN.] When will the house be finished, sirrah?

1ST CLOWN.

When it is done, Sir.

HORATIO.

Ay, fool, and when will that be?

1ST CLOWN.

When it is finished, o' course.

HORATIO.

[*To* FORTINBRAS.] There! What do you call *that?* Witty, eh?

FORTINBRAS.

I call it perfectly idiotic, if you ask me.

HORATIO.

Well, well; we'll try again. [*To* 1ST CLOWN.] And whose is the house, fellow?

1ST CLOWN.

[*Fatuously.*] Marry, his that owns it. Ask another.

HORATIO.

[*To* FORTINBRAS.] Ha! Ha! Good again. By the Lord, Fortinbras, as Hamlet used to say, the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier, it galls his kibe.

FORTINBRAS.

[*Savagely.*] The toe of the courtier is getting so perilously near the person of the peasant that you'd better get rid of the latter as soon as possible.

HORATIO.

[*Doubtfully.*] Perhaps you're right. And yet I was always taught to consider that kind of thing awfully entertaining. But, there. Fashions change in humour as in other things. Send them away.

FORTINBRAS.

[*Giving them money.*] Away with you, fellows. Go and get drunk. [*Exeunt clowns.*

HORATIO.

[*Relapses into blank verse on their departure.*] What think you of the New Wing, Fortinbras?
The whole effect is cheerful, is it not?
Good large sash windows, lots of light and air;
No mediæval nonsense.

FORTINBRAS.

[*Who does not admire the building.*] So I see!

HORATIO.

No ghosts *here*, eh, to stalk about the rooms
And fade against the crowing of the cock?

FORTINBRAS.

Probably not—and, yet—look there, Horatio;
There's something in the shadow over there,
Moving towards the house. It's going in.
Stop it, Horatio.

HORATIO.

[*Furious.*] Here, I can't stand this.
I'll cross it though it blast me. Stay, Illusion!
[*The figure stops.*

Are you aware, Sir, that you're trespassing ?
This is a private house.

GHOST.

[*In a sepulchral voice.*] *My* private house !

HORATIO.

Oh, come, you know, you can't mean that ! *Your* house ?
Considering that I'm building it myself—
Of course, assisted by an architect—
I think you must admit there's some mistake.

GHOST.

[*Turning and advancing towards them.*] Pooh ! What
do *I* care for your architect ?
It's *mine*, I say, *my* house, *my* plot, *my* play.
I made them all !

HORATIO.

Oh, my prophetic soul !
Shakspeare !

GHOST.

The same.

HORATIO.

I say, confound it all,
Do *you* propose to haunt the castle too ?

GHOST.

Yes, the New Wing

HORATIO.

It's really much too bad.
You've filled the old part of the house with spectres;
I think you might have left the new to me.

FORTINBRAS.

That seems a reasonable compromise.

GHOST.

I shall stay *here;* make up your mind to that,
But if you like to share the Wing with me
I've no objection.

HORATIO.

[*Stiffly.*] Thanks, I'd rather not.
I shall consult with my solicitor,
And if he can't eject you from the place
I'll sell it, ghosts and all! Come, Fortinbras.

[*Exit with dignity.*

Curtain.

Much Ado about Nothing.

The end of "Much Ado about Nothing" must always leave the sympathetic playgoer in tears. The future looks black for everybody concerned. Claudio's jealous disposition will make him a most uncomfortable husband for the resuscitated Hero, while Benedick and Beatrice are likely to find that a common taste in badinage is not the most satisfactory basis for matrimony. When it is added that Don John's genius for plotting is sure in the end to get him into trouble one feels that nothing can be gloomier than the prospects of the entire cast.

MORE ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

SCENE.—*The garden of* BENEDICK'S *house at Padua.* BENEDICK *is sitting on a garden seat, sunning himself indolently.* BEATRICE *is beside him, keeping up her reputation for conversational brilliancy by a series of sprightly witticisms.*

BEATRICE.

Very likely I do talk twice as much as I should. But then, if I talk too much you certainly listen far too little, so we are quits. Do you hear?

BENEDICK.

[*Opening his eyes slowly.*] Eh?

BEATRICE.

I believe you were asleep! But there—'tis a great compliment to my wit. Like Orpheus, I can put even the savage beasts to sleep with it. [*Benedick's eyes close again, and he appears to sink into a profound doze.*] But if the beasts go to sleep there's no use in being witty. I suppose Orpheus never thought of that. Come, wake

up, good Signior Beast. [*Prods him coquettishly with her finger.*] Have you forgotten that the Duke is coming?

BENEDICK.

[*Drowsily.*] When will he be here?

BEATRICE.

Ere you have done gaping.

BENEDICK.

[*Terribly bored by this badinage.*] My dear, if only you would occasionally answer a plain question. When do you expect him?

BEATRICE.

[*Skittish to the last.*] Plain questions should only be answered by plain people.

BENEDICK.

[*Yawning heartily.*] A pretty question then.

BEATRICE.

Pretty questions should only be asked by pretty people. There! What do you think of *that* for wit!

BENEDICK.

Really, my dear, I can hardly trust myself to characterise it in—er—fitting terms. [*Rings bell. Enter Page.*] When is the Duke expected?

PAGE.

In half-an-hour, Sir.

BENEDICK.

Thank you.

[*Exit Page.*

BEATRICE.

[*Pouting.*] You needn't have rung. *I* could have told you that.

BENEDICK.

I am sure you could, my dear. But as you wouldn't——

BEATRICE.

I was going to, if you had given me time.

BENEDICK.

Experience has taught me, my dear Beatrice, that it is usually much quicker to ring! [*Closes his eyes again.*]

BEATRICE.

How rude you are!

BENEDICK.

[*Half opening them.*] Eh?

BEATRICE.

I said it was very rude of you to go to sleep when I am talking.

BENEDICK.

[*Closing his eyes afresh.*] It's perfectly absurd of you to talk when I am going to sleep.

BEATRICE.

[*Girding herself for fresh witticisms.*] Why absurd?

BENEDICK.

Because I don't hear what you say, of course, my love.

BEATRICE.

[*Whose repartees have been scattered for the moment by this adroit compliment.*] Well, well, sleep your fill, Bear. I'll go and bandy epigrams with Ursula.

[*Exit* BEATRICE. BENEDICK *looks cautiously round to see if she is really gone, and then heaves a sigh of relief.*

BENEDICK.

Poor Beatrice! If only she were not so incorrigibly sprightly. She positively drives one to subterfuge.

[*Produces a book from his pocket, which he reads with every appearance of being entirely awake.*

Enter DON PEDRO, *as from a journey.*

BENEDICK *does not see him.*

DON PEDRO.

Signior Benedick!

BENEDICK.

[*Starting up on hearing his name.*] Ah, my dear Lord. Welcome to Padua.

DON PEDRO.

[*Looks him up and down.*] But how's this? You look but poorly, my good Benedick.

BENEDICK.

I am passing well, my Lord.

DON PEDRO.

And your wife, the fair Beatrice? As witty as ever?

BENEDICK.

[*Grimly.*] Quite!

DON PEDRO.

[*Rubbing his hands.*] I felt sure of it! *I* made the match, remember! *I* said to old Leonato "She were an excellent match for Benedick" as soon as I saw her.

BENEDICK.

[*Sighing.*] So you did, so you did.

DON PEDRO.

[*Puzzled.*] I'm bound to say you don't seem particularly happy.

BENEDICK.

[*Evasively.*] Oh, we get on well enough.

DON PEDRO.

Well enough! Why, what's the matter, man? Come, be frank with me.

BENEDICK.

[*Impressively.*] My dear Lord, never marry a witty wife! If you do, you'll repent it. But it's a painful subject. Let's talk of something else. How's Claudio? I thought we should see him—and Hero—with you.

DON PEDRO.

[*Looking slightly uncomfortable.*] Claudio is—er—fairly well.

BENEDICK.

Why, what's the matter with him? *His* wife isn't developing into a wit, is she?

DON PEDRO.

No. She's certainly not doing *that!*

BENEDICK.

Happy Claudio! But why aren't they here then?

" My dear Lord, never marry a witty wife ! "

DON PEDRO.

[*Coughing nervously.*] Well, the truth is, Claudio's marriage hasn't been exactly one of my successes. You remember I made *that* match too?

BENEDICK.

I remember. Don't they hit it off?

DON PEDRO.

[*Querulously.*] It was all Claudio's suspicious temper. He never would disabuse his mind of the idea that Hero was making love to somebody else. You remember he began that even before he was married. First it was *me* he suspected. Then it was the mysterious man under her balcony.

BENEDICK.

You suspected him too.

DON PEDRO.

That's true. But that was all my brother John's fault. Anyhow, I thought when they were once married things would settle down comfortably.

BENEDICK.

You were curiously sanguine. I should have thought anyone would have seen that after that scene in the church they would never be happy together.

DON PEDRO.

Perhaps so. Anyhow, they weren't. Of course, everything was against them. What with my brother John's absolute genius for hatching plots, and my utter inability to detect them, not to speak of Claudio's unfortunate propensity for overhearing conversations and misunderstanding them, the intervals of harmony between them were extremely few, and, at last, Hero lost patience and divorced him.

BENEDICK.

So bad as that? How did it happen?

DON PEDRO.

Oh, in the old way. My brother pretended that Hero was unfaithful, and as he could produce no evidence of the fact whatever, of course Claudio believed him. So, with his old passion for making scenes, he selected the moment when I and half-a-dozen others were staying at the house and denounced her before us all after dinner.

BENEDICK.

The church scene over again?

DON PEDRO.

No. It took place in the drawing-room. Hero behaved with her usual dignity, declined to discuss Claudio's

accusations altogether, put the matter in the hands of her solicitor, and the decree was made absolute last week.

BENEDICK.

She was perfectly innocent, of course?

DON PEDRO.

Completely. It was merely another *ruse* on the part of my amiable brother. Really, John's behaviour was inexcusable.

BENEDICK.

Was Claudio greatly distressed when he found how he had been deceived?

DON PEDRO.

He was distracted. But Hero declined to have anything more to do with him. She said she could forgive a man for making a fool of himself once, but twice was too much of a good thing.

BENEDICK.

[*Frowning.*] That sounds rather more epigrammatic than a really *nice* wife's remarks should be.

DON PEDRO.

She had great provocation.

BENEDICK.

That's true. And one can see her point of view. It was the publicity of the thing that galled her, no doubt. But poor Claudio had no reticence whatever. That scene in the church was in the worst possible taste. But I forgot. *You* had a share in that.

DON PEDRO.

[*Stiffly.*] I don't think we need go into that question.

BENEDICK.

And now to select the hour, after a dinner party, for taxing his wife with infidelity! How like Claudio! Really, he must be an absolute fool.

DON PEDRO.

Oh, well, *your* marriage doesn't seem to have been a conspicuous success, if you come to that.

BENEDICK.

[*Savagely.*] That's no great credit to you, is it? *You* made the match. You said as much a moment ago.

DON PEDRO.

I know, I know. But seriously, my dear Benedick, what is wrong?

BENEDICK.

[*Snappishly.*] Beatrice, of course. You don't suppose *I'm* wrong, do you?

DON PEDRO.

Come, that's better. A spark of the old Benedick. Let me call your wife to you, and we'll have one of your old encounters of wit.

BENEDICK.

[*Seriously alarmed.*] For Heaven's sake, no. Ah, my dear Lord, if you only knew how weary I am of wit, especially Beatrice's wit.

DON PEDRO.

You surprise me. I remember I thought her a most amusing young lady.

BENEDICK.

[*Tersely.*] You weren't married to her.

DON PEDRO.

But what is it you complain of?

BENEDICK.

Beatrice *bores me*. It is all very well to listen to sparkling sallies for ten minutes or so, but Beatrice sparkles for hours together. She is utterly incapable

of answering the simplest question without a blaze of epigram. When I ask her what time it is, she becomes so insufferably facetious that all the clocks stop in disgust. And once when I was thoughtless enough to enquire what there was for dinner, she made so many jokes on the subject that I had to go down without her. And even then the soup was cold!

DON PEDRO.

[*Quoting.*] "Here you may see Benedick, the married man!"

BENEDICK.

Don't *you* try to be funny too! One joker in a household is quite enough, I can tell you. And poor Beatrice's jokes aren't always in the best of taste either. The other day, when the Vicar came to lunch he was so shocked at her that he left before the meal was half over and his wife has never called since.

DON PEDRO.

My poor Benedick, I wish I could advise you. But I really don't know what to suggest. My brother could have helped you, I'm sure. He was always so good at intrigue. But unfortunately I had him executed after his last exploit with Claudio. It's most unlucky. But

that's the worst of making away with a villain. You never know when you may need him. Poor John could always be depended upon in an emergency of this kind.

BENEDICK.

[*Gloomily.*] He is certainly a great loss.

DON PEDRO.

Don't you think you could arrange so that Beatrice should overhear you making love to someone else? We've tried that sort of thing more than once in this play.

BENEDICK.

[*Acidly.*] As the result has invariably been disastrous, I think we may dismiss that expedient from our minds. No, there's nothing for it but to put up with the infliction, and by practising a habit of mental abstraction, reduce the evil to within bearable limits.

DON PEDRO.

I don't think I quite follow you.

BENEDICK.

In plain English, my dear Lord, I find the only way to go on living with Beatrice is never to listen to her. As soon as she begins to be witty I fall into a kind of

swoon, and in that comatose condition I can live through perfect coruscations of brilliancy without inconvenience.

DON PEDRO.

Does she like that ?

BENEDICK.

Candidly, I don't think she does.

DON PEDRO.

Hold! I have an idea.

BENEDICK.

[*Nervously.*] I hope not. Your ideas have been singularly unfortunate hitherto in my affairs.

DON PEDRO.

Ah, but you'll approve of this.

BENEDICK.

What is it ?

DON PEDRO.

Leave your wife, and come away with me.

BENEDICK.

[*Doubtfully.*] She'd come after us.

DON PEDRO.

Yes, but we should have the start.

BENEDICK.

That's true. By Jove, I'll do it! Let's go at once.

[*Rises Hastily.*

DON PEDRO.

I think you ought to leave some kind of message for her—just to say good-bye; you know. It seems more polite.

BENEDICK.

Perhaps so. [*Tears leaf out of pocket-book.*] What shall it be, prose or verse? I remember Claudio burst into poetry when he was taking leave of Hero. Such bad poetry too!

DON PEDRO.

I think you might make it verse—as you're leaving her for ever. It seems more in keeping with the solemnity of the occasion.

BENEDICK.

So it does. [*Writes.*]

Bored to death by BEATRICE' tongue
Was the hero that lived here——

DON PEDRO.

Hush! Isn't that your wife over there in the arbour?

BENEDICK.

[*Losing his temper.*] Dash it all! There's nothing but eaves-dropping in this play.

DON PEDRO.

Perhaps she doesn't see us. Let's steal off, anyhow, on the chance.

[*They creep off on tip-toe* (R) *as* BEATRICE *enters with similar caution* (L).

BEATRICE.

[*Watching them go.*] Bother! I thought I should overhear what they were saying. I believe Benedick is really running away. It's just as well. If he hadn't, *I* should. He had really grown too dull for anything. [*Sees note which* BENEDICK *has left.*] Ah, so he's left a message. "Farewell for ever," I suppose. [*Reads it. Stamps her foot.*] Monster! If I ever see him again I'll scratch him!

Curtain.

The Critic.

Everybody who has seen "The Critic" must have been filled with curiosity to read the Press notices on Mr. Puff's tragedy "The Spanish Armada." The following sequel to Sheridan's comedy embodies some of these.

THE OTHER CRITICS.

SCENE.—DANGLE'S *house.* MR. *and* MRS. DANGLE, SNEER *and* SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY *discovered discussing the first performance of* PUFF'S *play, which has taken place a week previously. A table is littered with Press cuttings dealing with the event, supplied by the indispensable Romeike.*

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

I give you my word, the duel scene was taken wholly from my comedy *The Lovers Abandoned*—pilfered, egad!

DANGLE.

Bless my soul! You don't say so?

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

And *Tilburina's* speech about the "finches of the grove." 'Twas *I* first thought of finches, in my tragedy of *Antoninus!*

DANGLE.

But I can't believe my friend Puff can have borrowed deliberately from *you*, Sir Fretful.

SNEER.

No one could possibly believe *that !*

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

Eh ?

MRS. DANGLE.

It must have been a coincidence.

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

Coincidence ! Egad, Madam, 'twas sheer theft. And that use of the white handkerchief ! Stolen bodily, on my conscience. Coincidence !

DANGLE.

[*Judicially.*] It may be so—though he *is* my friend.

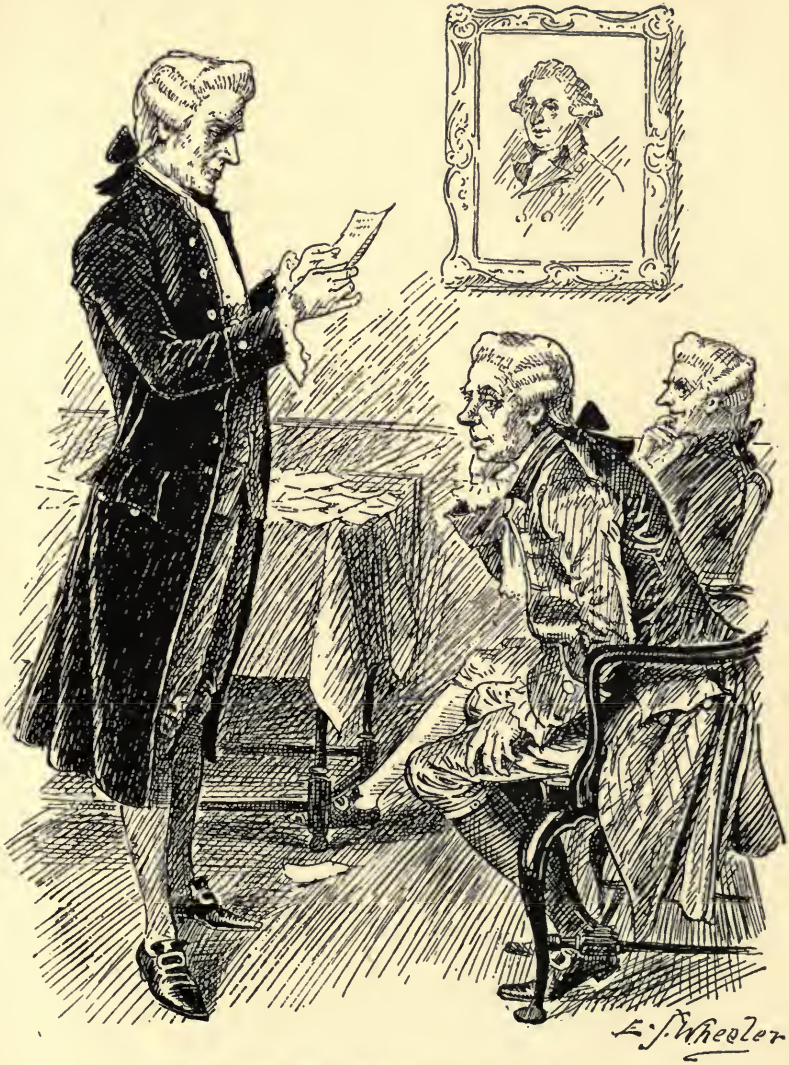
SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

May be so ! It *is* so ! Zounds, Dangle, I take it very ill that you should have any doubt at all about the matter !

DANGLE.

[*Hedging.*] The resemblances are certainly very marked—though he *is* my friend. But will you hear what the critics say about it ?

[*Turning nervously to pile of Press cuttings.*



"But they're very severe on the play."

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

Do they say anything about his indebtedness to *me?*

SNEER.

Not a word, I dare be sworn.

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

Then I don't want to hear them. None of the rogues know their business.

DANGLE.

But they're very severe on the play.

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

Are they? There's something in the fellows, after all. Pray read us some of the notices.

DANGLE.

Shall I begin with *The Times?* 'Tis very satirical, and as full of quotations as a pudding is of plums.

SNEER.

I know the style—a vocabulary recruited from all the dead and living languages. 'Tis the very Babel of dramatic criticism. Begin, Dangle.

DANGLE.

[*Reading.*] "The philosopher who found in thought the proof of existence, crystallised his theory in the

phrase '*Cogito ergo sum*,' 'I think, therefore, I exist.' In this he found the explanation of what Hugo called the *néant géant*. The theory of the author of *The Spanish Armada*, on the contrary, seems to be '*Sum, ergo non cogitabo*,' 'I exist, therefore I need not think'——"

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

Ha! Ha! Very good, i' faith.

DANGLE.

[*Continuing.*] "'*Lasciate ogni speranza*' the audience murmurs with Dante, as three mortal hours pass and Mr. Puff is still prosing. Nor has he any dramatic novelty to offer us. The *scène à faire* is on conventional lines. The boards are hoar with the *neiges d'antan*. There is the *anagnorisis* desiderated by Aristotle, and the unhappy ending required by the Elizabethans. The inevitable *peripeteia*——"

MRS. DANGLE.

You know, Mr. Dangle, I don't understand a single word you're reading.

SNEER.

Nor I, upon my soul.

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

It is certainly somewhat difficult.

DANGLE.

Shall I omit a few sentences, and go on again, where the allusions are less obscure? [*Reads half aloud to himself, knitting his brows in the effort to understand what it is all about.*] No trace of Heine's *Weltschmerz* . . . . *capo e espada* . . . . Nietschze's *Uebermensch* . . . . *ne coram pueros* . . . . Petrarch's immortal *Io t' amo* . . . . *le canif du jardinier et celui de mon père*——"

MRS. DANGLE.

Really, Mr. Dangle, if you can find nothing more intelligible to read than that farrago of jargon, I shall go away. Pray read us something in *English*, for a change.

DANGLE.

[*Much relieved, selecting another cutting.*] Here's the *Daily Telegraph*—a whole column.

SNEER.

Not much *English* there, I'll warrant.

DANGLE.

[*Reading.*] "Time was when the London playhouses had not been invaded by the coarse suggestiveness or the veiled indelicacy of the Norwegian stage, when

Paterfamilias could still take his daughters to the theatre without a blush. Those days are past. The Master—as his followers call him—like a deadly upas tree, has spread his blighting influence over our stage. Morality, shocked at the fare that is nightly set before her, shuns the playhouse, and vice usurps the scene once occupied by the manly and the true——"

SNEER.

[*Who has been beating time.*] Hear! hear!

DANGLE.

"In the good old days, when Macready——"

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

Zounds, Mr. Dangle, don't you think we might leave Macready out of the question? I notice that when the *Daily Telegraph* mentions Macready the reference never occupies less than a quarter of a column. You might omit that part, and take up the thread further on.

DANGLE.

Very well. [*Continuing.*] "It is impossible not to be astonished that a writer of Mr. Puff's talents should break away from the noble traditions of Shakspeare to follow in the footsteps of the Scandinavian——"

MRS. DANGLE.

Surely, Mr. Dangle, we've had that before.

DANGLE.

[*Testily.*] No; not in the same words.

MRS. DANGLE.

But the sense——

DANGLE.

Egad, why will you interrupt! You can't expect a writer for the penny press to have something new to say in every sentence! How the plague is a dramatic critic who has nothing to say to fill a column, if he is never to be allowed to repeat himself?

SNEER.

How, indeed!

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

Ah, I remember when my play *The Indulgent Husband* was produced——"

SNEER.

[*Yawning.*] I think, Dangle, you might leave the *Telegraph* and try one of the weekly papers. What does *The World* say?

DANGLE.

As you will. [*Selecting a new cutting.*] "In his new play *The Spanish Armada* Mr. Puff has set himself to deal with one of those problems of feminine psychology with which Ibsen, Hauptmann, and Sudermann, and all the newer school of continental dramatists have made us familiar. The problem is briefly this. When filial duty beckons a woman one way and passion another, which call should she obey? Should she set herself to 'live her life,' in the modern phrase, to realise her individuality and stand forth glad and free as Gregers Werle says? Or should she deny her *ego*, bow to the old conventions, accept the old Shibboleths and surrender her love? Like *Nora*, like *Hedda*, *Tilburina* is a personality at war with its environment . . . ."

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

[*Interrupting.*] Pray, Mr. Dangle, did you not tell me the critics were all unfavourable to Mr. Puff's play?

DANGLE.

Nearly all of them. But if the other critics abuse a play, you will always find the critic of *The World* will praise it. 'Tis the nature of the man.

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

But how does he know what the other fellows will say?

DANGLE.

Easily. You see, he writes only for a weekly paper, and always reads what the others have said first. *Then* he takes the opposite view.

SNEER.

No wonder he's so often right!

DANGLE.

[*Continuing.*] "In Whiskerandos we have the man of primary emotions only. Like Solnes, he climbs no steeples; like Lövborg, he may now and then be seen with the vine leaves in his hair . . . ."

MRS. DANGLE.

Stop, stop, Mr. Dangle! Surely there must be some mistake. I don't remember that Whiskerandos had anything in his hair. He wore a helmet all the time!

DANGLE.

[*Irritably.*] Metaphor, madam, metaphor! [*Continuing.*] "In Lord Burleigh we hear something of the epic silence which is so tremendous in Borkman . . . ."

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

Egad, Mr. Dangle, doesn't the fellow abuse the play at all?

DANGLE.

[*Looking through the article.*] I don't think he does.

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY.

Then I'll hear no more of him. What possible pleasure can there be in hearing criticisms of other people's plays if they are favourable?

SNEER.

None whatever!

[*Enter servant.*

SERVANT.

[*Announcing.*] Mr. Puff!

DANGLE.

[*Advancing to meet him with a smile of the warmest affability.*] Ah, my dear friend, we were reading the notice of your tragedy in *The World.* 'Tis extremely friendly. And as Sir Fretful remarked a moment since, "What pleasure can there be in reading criticisms of people's plays if they aren't favourable?"

PUFF.

Sir Fretful is most obliging.

SIR FRETFUL PLAGIARY

The *Telegraph* was somewhat severe, though, eh, Mr. Puff?

PUFF.

'Tis very like.

DANGLE.

You have not seen it? Let me read it to you.

[*Searches eagerly in pile of cuttings.*

PUFF.

[*Indifferently.*] I never look at unfavourable criticisms.

SNEER.

A wise precaution, truly!

PUFF.

Very. It saves valuable time. For if a notice is unfavourable, I am always sure to have it read aloud to me by one d——d good-natured friend or another!

Curtain.

The School for Scandal.

"The School for Scandal" ends, it will be remembered, with the reconciliation of Sir Peter and Lady Teazle, the complete exposure of Joseph Surface and the rehabilitation of Charles. But how long did the Teazle reconciliation last? And if Sir Oliver Surface left all his fortune to his nephew Charles, how long did that young gentleman take to run through it?

THE RELAPSE OF LADY TEAZLE.

SCENE.—*Room in* SIR PETER TEAZLE'S *house.* SIR PETER *and* LADY TEAZLE *discovered wrangling as in Act II.*

SIR PETER.

Lady Teazle, Lady Teazle, I'll not bear it.

LADY TEAZLE.

Sir Peter, Sir Peter, you've told me that a hundred times. This habit of repeating yourself is most distressing. 'Tis a sure sign of old age.

SIR PETER.

[*In a passion.*] Oons, Madam, will you never be tired of flinging my age in my face?

LADY TEAZLE.

Lud, Sir Peter, 'tis you that fling it in mine. How often have you said to me [*beating time*] "when an *old* bachelor marries a *young* wife——"

SIR PETER.

And if I have, Lady Teazle, you needn't repeat it after me. But you live only to plague me. And yet 'twas but six months ago you vowed never to cross me again. Yes, Madam, six months ago, when I found you concealed behind a screen in Mr. Surface's library, you promised that if I would forgive you your future conduct should prove the sincerity of your repentance. I forgave you, Madam, and this is my reward!

LADY TEAZLE.

And am *I* to blame, Sir Peter, for your ill-humours? Must I always be making concessions? To please you, I have given up all routs and assemblies, attend no balls nor quadrilles, talk no scandal, never ogle nor flirt. I go no more to my Lady Sneerwell's, though I vow hers was a most delightful house to visit. Such fashion and elegance. Such wit! Such delicate malice!

SIR PETER.

[*Fretfully.*] Just so, Madam; that is what I complain of. All the while you are longing to return to these follies. You are not happy when you are alone with me.

LADY TEAZLE.

Great heavens, Sir Peter: you must not ask for miracles. What woman of fashion is ever happy alone with her husband?

SIR PETER.

There it is, Lady Teazle. You think only of fashion. And yet, when I married you——

LADY TEAZLE.

[*Yawning.*] Lud, Sir Peter, why will you be always returning to that painful subject?

SIR PETER.

Vastly painful, no doubt, Madam, since it prevents you from marrying Mr. Surface, behind whose screen I found you.

LADY TEAZLE.

[*Yawning more heartily.*] Mr. Surface? But 'twas Charle you used to suspect.

SIR PETER.

[*Angrily.*] And now 'tis Joseph. Zounds, Madam, is a man never to be allowed to change his mind? [*Raising his voice in fury.*] I say 'tis Joseph! Joseph!! Joseph!!!

[*Enter* JOSEPH SURFACE. SIR PETER *and* LADY TEAZLE *are obviously disconcerted at this inopportune arrival, and*

say nothing. JOSEPH *has greatly changed in appearance in the six months which have elapsed between the play and the sequel. He has lost his sleekness and his air of conscious virtue, and looks like a careless, good-humoured man-about-town.*

JOSEPH.

[*Obviously enjoying their discomfort.*] Sir Peter, your servant. Lady Teazle, your most obedient [*bows profoundly*].

SIR PETER.

[*Stiffly.*] To what, Mr. Surface, do we owe the *honour* of this visit?

JOSEPH.

[*Blandly, correcting him.*] *Pleasure*, Sir Peter.

SIR PETER.

[*Testily.*] I said "honour," Sir.

JOSEPH.

[*Easily.*] I came at the invitation of Sir Oliver, who is staying in your house. He desired to see me.

LADY TEAZLE.

[*Viciously, to* SIR PETER.] If this gentleman's business is with Sir Oliver, perhaps he will explain why he has intruded in *this* room.

JOSEPH.

[*Amused.*] With pleasure. My attention was arrested by the sound of voices raised in dispute. I heard my name mentioned loudly more than once, and, recognizing one of the voices as that of Lady Teazle [*with a low bow*], I thought it better to interpose to defend my character at once.

LADY TEAZLE.

[*Stamping her foot.*] Insolent!

SIR PETER.

[*Chuckling.*] Ha, ha! Very good. I' faith, Mr. Surface, I could almost find it in my heart to forgive you for your injuries towards me when you talk like that.

JOSEPH.

Injuries, Sir Peter? I never did you an injury. That affair of the screen was the merest misunderstanding. I had no desire at all to capture the affections of Lady Teazle. On the contrary, 'twould have been highly inconvenient for me. 'Twas your ward Maria that I wished to win.

LADY TEAZLE.

Monster!

JOSEPH.

[*Continuing.*] Unhappily, Lady Teazle mistook the nature of my attentions and I, knowing her temper [*bowing to* LADY TEAZLE], feared to undeceive her lest she should use her influence to prejudice me in the eyes of your ward. That, Sir Peter, is the true explanation of the situation in which you found Lady Teazle on that unlucky morning.

LADY TEAZLE.

[*With suppressed fury.*] Pray Sir Peter, do you propose to continue to permit this gentleman to speak of me in this way?

SIR PETER.

Certainly, Madam. Everything that Mr. Surface has said seems to me to bear the stamp of truth.

LADY TEAZLE.

Ah!

JOSEPH.

So, you see, Sir Peter, you never had any real cause of jealousy towards me. My conduct was foolish, I admit, but it was never criminal.

SIR PETER.

Joseph, I believe you. Give me your hand. Six months ago I thought you guilty of the basest treachery

towards me. But a year of marriage with Lady Teazle has convinced me that, in her relations with you as in her relations with me, it is always Lady Teazle who is in the wrong.

[*They shake hands warmly.*

LADY TEAZLE.

I will not stay here to be insulted in this manner. I will go straight to Lady Sneerwell's, and tear both your characters to tatters.

[*Exit in a violent passion.*

SIR PETER.

Oons, what a fury! But when an old bachelor marries a young wife——

JOSEPH.

Come, come, Sir Peter, no sentiments!

SIR PETER.

What, *you* say that! My dear Joseph, this is indeed a reformation. Had it been Charles now, I should not have been surprised.

JOSEPH.

Egad, Sir Peter, in the matter of sentiments Charles, for a long time, had a most unfair advantage of me. For, having no character to lose, he had no need of sentiments

to support it. But now I have as little character as he, and we start fair. Now I am a free man; I say what I think, do what I please. Scandal has done its worst with me, and I no longer fear it. Whereas, when I had a character for morality to maintain, all my time was wasted in trying to live up to it. I had to conceal every trifling flirtation, and had finally wrapped myself in such a web of falsehood that when your hand tore away the veil, I give you my word, I was almost grateful. Depend upon it, Sir Peter, there's no possession in the world so troublesome as a good reputation.

SIR PETER.

[*Digging him in the ribs.*] Ah, Joseph, you're a sad dog. But here comes your uncle, Sir Oliver. I'll leave you with him.

[*Exit.*

Enter SIR OLIVER, *reading a sheaf of legal documents.*

SIR OLIVER.

[*Reading.*] Eighty, one hundred and twenty, two hundred and twenty, three hundred pounds! Gad, the dog will ruin me.

JOSEPH.

Sir Oliver, your servant.

"Ah, Joseph, you're a sad dog!"

SIR OLIVER.

[*Looking up.*] Eh? Is that you, Nephew. Yes, I remember. I sent for you.

JOSEPH.

You are busy this morning, Uncle. I'll wait upon you another day.

SIR OLIVER.

No, no, Joseph. Stay, and hear what I have to tell you. I sent for you to say that I had decided to pardon your past misconduct and restore you to favour. Six months of Charles's society have convinced me of the folly of adopting a reprobate.

JOSEPH.

I thought they would, Uncle.

SIR OLIVER.

Your brother's extravagances pass all bounds. Here are four writs which were served upon him but yesterday. And the fellow has the assurance to send them on to me. [JOSEPH *laughs heartily.*] Zounds, Nephew, don't stand chuckling there. And his character has not reformed one whit, in spite of his promises. His flirtations with my Lady Sneerwell and others are so excessive that

Maria has quite thrown him over, and the engagement is broken off. Add to this that I have paid his debts three times, only to find him contracting fresh liabilities, and you may judge that my patience is exhausted.

JOSEPH.

But these are old stories, Uncle. You knew that Charles was vicious and extravagant when you made him your heir. He has done nothing fresh to offend you.

SIR OLIVER.

On the contrary. He has done something which has hurt me deeply.

JOSEPH.

How absurd of him, Uncle, when he knows that he is dependent wholly on your bounty!

SIR OLIVER.

Wait till you have heard the whole story. A week ago your brother came to me for money to meet some gambling debt. I refused him. Whereupon, he returned to his house, had in an auctioneer and sold everything that it contained.

JOSEPH.

[*Much amused.*] And did you play little Premium a second time, Uncle?

SIR OLIVER.

[*Testily.*] Certainly not, Sir. On this occasion I left the rogue to settle matters for himself.

JOSEPH.

But I see no great harm in this. Why should not Charles sell his furniture?

SIR OLIVER.

[*Angrily.*] Deuce ake his furniture. He sold my picture!

JOSEPH.

What, "the ill-looking little fellow over the settee"?

SIR OLIVER.

Yes.

JOSEPH.

Ha! ha! ha! Delicious! Sold his Uncle's portrait! Gad, I like his spirit.

SIR OLIVER.

You seem vastly entertained, Nephew!

JOSEPH.

I confess the humour of the situation appeals to me.

SIR OLIVER.

Happily for you I am less easily amused. No, no; Charles is a heartless scoundrel, and I'll disown him.

JOSEPH.

No, no, Uncle. He's no worse than other young men.

SIR OLIVER.

But he sold my picture!

JOSEPH.

He was pressed for money.

SIR OLIVER.

[*Exasperated.*] But he sold my picture!!

JOSEPH.

He meant no harm, I'll be bound.

SIR OLIVER.

[*Still more enraged.*] But he sold my picture!!!

[*Enter* SIR PETER *hurriedly, looking pale and disordered.*

JOSEPH.

My dear Sir Peter, you are ill! You have had bad news?

SIR OLIVER.

Sir Peter, old friend, what is it?

SIR PETER.

[*Gasping.*] Lady Teazle——

[*Stops, choked with passion.*

SIR OLIVER.

Not dead?

SIR PETER.

Dead! Hell and furies! if it were only that! No; run away with your profligate nephew Charles!

JOSEPH.

Impossible!

SIR OLIVER.

Is this certain?

SIR PETER.

Ay. Rowley saw them driving together in a post-chaise towards Richmond, not ten minutes ago.

SIR OLIVER.

Then I disown him. Joseph, you are my heir. But see that you behave yourself, or I'll disinherit you, too, and leave my money to a missionary society.

Curtain.

She Stoops to Conquer.

Many people must have wondered whether happiness resulted from the marriage between Charles Marlow, whose shyness with ladies, it will be remembered, prevented his ever having a word to say to any woman above the rank of a barmaid, and the vivacious Kate Hardcastle. The following sequel reveals the painful truth.

STILL STOOPING.

SCENE.—*The parlour of* CHARLES MARLOW'S *house. He and* KATE *are sitting on opposite sides of the fire. Silence reigns, and* CHARLES *fidgets nervously.*

KATE.

[*Anticipating a remark subsequently made by* PAULA TANQUERAY.] Six minutes!

CHARLES.

[*Finding his tongue with an effort.*] Er—eh?

KATE.

Exactly six minutes, dear, since you made your last remark.

CHARLES.

[*Laughing uneasily and blushing.*] Um—ah!—ha! ha.

KATE.

Well? What are you going to say next? It's really time you made an observation of some kind, you know.

CHARLES.

[*Helplessly.*] Um—er—I've nothing to say.

KATE.

[*Rallying him.*] Come, make an effort.

CHARLES.

[*In desperation.*] It's—er—a fine day.

KATE.

[*Genially.*] Considering that it's raining steadily, dear, and has been for the past half-hour, I hardly think that can be considered a fortunate opening.

CHARLES.

[*Covered with confusion.*] Confound it! so it is. Forgive me—er—my dear, I didn't know what I was saying.

KATE.

You very seldom do, dear—to me.

CHARLES.

What a fool you must think me!

KATE.

[*Touched by his evident sincerity.*] Never mind. It's a shame to laugh at you. But you *are* rather absurd, you

"But I've always been shy."

know. [*She goes over and kisses him. He accepts the caress with gratitude, but blushes painfully.*]

CHARLES.

I know, my love. But I've always been shy like that. It's an idiosyncrasy.

KATE.

Not idiosyncrasy, dear. Idiocy. The words are so much alike.

CHARLES.

[*Hurt.*] Ah, now you're laughing at me!

KATE.

Of course I am, goose. [*Argumentatively.*] You see, dear, as long as you were a bachelor it was all very well to be bashful. But now that we are married, I really think you ought to fight against it!

CHARLES.

Fight against it! I fight against it every hour of the day. Every morning I say to myself, "I really must get over this ridiculous shyness. I must try and show Kate how much I—er—love her."

KATE.

You are curiously unsuccessful, dear.

CHARLES.

[*Miserably.*] I feel that. But it's not for lack of trying. [*Desperately.*] Do you suppose, Kate, that anything but the strongest effort of will keeps me sitting in this chair at this moment? Do I ever, save under compulsion, remain in the same room with *any* lady for more than five minutes? Why, my dear girl, if I didn't love you to distraction, I shouldn't remain here an instant!

KATE.

You certainly have a curious method of displaying an ardent attachment.

CHARLES.

Yes. It's most unfortunate. But I warned you, dear, didn't I? I told you all about my absurd bashfulness before we became engaged. You knew that the presence of ladies invariably reduced me to speechlessness before you accepted me.

KATE.

[*Sweetly.*] Not *invariably*, my love. What about your prowess with Mrs. Mantrap and Lady Betty Blackleg that you told me about? [CHARLES *blushes crimson.*] Didn't they call you "their agreeable Rattle" at the Ladies' Club in Town?

CHARLES.

I—er—get on well enough with—um—er disreputable ladies. But you—er—aren't disreputable.

KATE.

You are too modest, dear. Some of your conquests are *quite* respectable. Didn't I come upon you in the act of kissing Anne, the housemaid, yesterday? And no one can pretend that *my* housemaids are disreputable!

CHARLES.

[*Sighing.*] Yes. I'm not shy with housemaids.

KATE.

So I noticed. I sent Anne away this morning.

CHARLES.

[*With real concern.*] Not Anne!

KATE.

Yes. And Sarah too. I thought I detected in you a lurking *penchant* for Sarah.

CHARLES.

[*Simply.*] Yes, I liked Sarah.

KATE.

So now we haven't a single maid in the house. It's really very inconvenient.

CHARLES.

You must get others.

KATE.

For you to make eyes at? Certainly not. By the way, is there *any* type of female domestic servant whom you do not find irresistibly attractive? Dark ones? Fair ones? Young ones? Old ones? Tall ones? Short ones? [*He shakes his head at each question.*] Not one?

CHARLES.

I'm afraid not.

KATE.

[*With decision.*] Then I must do the house-work myself.

CHARLES.

[*Delighted.*] Charming! My dear Kate, how delightful! Put on a cap and apron and take a broom in your hand, and my bashfulness will vanish at once. I know it will.

KATE.

It seems the only course open to us, especially as there's no one else to sweep the rooms. But I wish you were not so unfortunately constituted.

CHARLES.

[*Heartily.*] So do I. But, after all, we must accept facts and make the best of them. You stooped to conquer, you know. You must go on stooping. Go and put on an apron at once.

SCENE II.—CHARLES'S *special sitting-room, where he is wont to hide his shyness from visitors. Time, a week later.* KATE, *in a print dress, cap and apron, is on her knees before the fire-place cleaning up the hearth.*

CHARLES.

[*Entering the room unperceived, stealing up behind her and giving her a sounding kiss.*] Still stooping, Kate!

KATE.

Charles! [*Rising.*]

CHARLES.

[*Kissing her again.*] Ah, Kate, Kate, what a charming little creature you are, and how much I love you!

KATE.

But how long will you go on loving me?

CHARLES.

Always, dearest—in a cap and apron. [*Embraces her.*]

KATE.

It's rather hard that I should have to remain a housemaid permanently in order to retain my husband's affection.

CHARLES.

[*Seriously.*] It is, dear. I see that.

KATE.

However, there's nothing to be done, so I may as well accustom myself to the idea as soon as possible. [*Takes a broom and begins to sweep the floor.*] You don't think your absurd shyness is likely to diminish with time?

CHARLES.

It may, dear. But I think it would be unwise to count upon it. No, as far as I can see, the only thing to be done is for you to continue in your present occupation—you sweep charmingly—for the rest of your natural life.

KATE.

[*Sweeping industriously.*] What would my father say if he saw me!

CHARLES.

[*Easily.*] He won't see you. He hasn't been over since we were married.

[*A ring is heard.*

KATE.

[*Starting.*] Who's that?

CHARLES.

What does it matter? No one will be shown in here. Jenkins has orders never to bring visitors into my room.

KATE.

That's true. [*Returns to her sweeping.*]

[*Suddenly the door opens and* MR. HARDCASTLE *enters, with elaborate heartiness, thrusting aside* JENKINS, *who vainly tries to keep him out.*

HARDCASTLE.

Zounds, man, out of the way! Don't talk to me about the parlour. Can't I come and see my son-in-law in any room I choose?

[CHARLES *mutters an oath;* KATE *stands, clutching her broom convulsively, facing her father.*

HARDCASTLE.

[*Boisterously.*] How d'ye do, son-in-law? Kate, my dear, give me a kiss. Heavens, child, don't stand there clinging to a broomstick as though you were going to fly away with it. Come and kiss your old father.

[KATE *drops the broom nervously and kisses him obediently.*

CHARLES.

[*Endeavouring by the warmth of his welcome to divert attention from his wife.*] How d'ye do, Sir—How d'ye do? [*Wringing his hand.*]

HARDCASTLE.

[*Noticing a small heap of dust on the carpet, which has been collected by* KATE'S *exertions.*] Eh, what's this? Why, I believe you were actually sweeping the room, Kate!

KATE.

[*Shamefacedly.*] I am sorry, father, that you should have found me so unsuitably employed.

HARDCASTLE.

Unsuitably? On the contrary, nothing could be more suitable.

KATE.

[*Annoyed.*] Come, Papa, don't *you* begin to be eccentric too!

HARDCASTLE.

[*Stiffly.*] I am not aware that there is anything eccentric about me.

CHARLES.

[*Intervening nervously.*] No, no, Sir. Of course not.

HARDCASTLE.

But when I find my daughter laying aside her finery and looking after her house, I cannot conceal my satisfaction. Ah, Charles, you have improved her greatly. When she lived at home, you remember, I had hard enough work to persuade her to lay aside fine clothes and wear her housewife's dress in the evenings. As for sweeping, I never even ventured to suggest it.

KATE.

[*Indignantly.*] I should think not!

HARDCASTLE.

And yet, Kate, if you knew how charming you look in a print frock, a cap and apron——

KATE.

[*Laughing in spite of herself.*] You, too! Really, papa, I'm ashamed of you. However, you seem both of you determined that I should pass the remainder of my days as a housemaid, so I suppose you must have your way. This is what comes of "stooping to conquer." Now go away, both of you, and leave me to finish sweeping.

[*Takes up broom again resolutely.*

HARDCASTLE.

We will, Kate. Come, Charles.

[*Exit.*

CHARLES.

Coming, Sir [*darting across to his wife and kissing her.*] Darling!

KATE.

Goose!

[*He goes out hurriedly after* HARDCASTLE.

Curtain.

The Lady of Lyons.

When L rd Lytton provided the conventional "happy ending" for "The Lady of Lyons" by reuniting Pauline, née Deschappelles, to the devoted Claude Melnotte, promoting the latter to the rank of Colonel in the French army, he seems not to have troubled his head as to the divergent social ideas of the happy pair, nor as to how the vulgar and purse-proud family of Deschappelles and the humbler Melnottes would get on together. The sequel throws a lurid light on these points. In writing it, great pains have been taken to make the blank verse, wherever possible, as bad as Lord Lytton's.

IN THE LYONS DEN.

SCENE.—*The drawing-room of* CLAUDE MELNOTTE'S *house.* PAULINE *is sitting by the fire,* CLAUDE *leaning with his back against the mantelpiece.* JAMES, *a man-servant in livery, enters with a card on a salver.*

PAULINE.

[*Reading card.*] Mrs. Smith! Not at home, James.

CLAUDE.

[*Who can never quite get out of his habit of speaking in blank verse*]. Why are you not at home to Mrs. Smith?

PAULINE.

My dear Claude, that woman! Mr. Smith kept a greengrocer's shop. 'Tis true he made a great deal of money by his contracts to supply the armies of the Republic with vegetables, but they are not gentlepeople!

CLAUDE.

[*In his most Byronic manner.*] What is it makes a gentleman, Pauline?

Is it to have a cousin in the Peerage——

PAULINE.

Partly that, dear.

CLAUDE.

[*Refusing to be interrupted.*] Or is it to be honest, simple, kind——

PAULINE.

But I have no reason for believing Mr. Smith to have been more honest than the general run of army contractors.

CLAUDE.

[*Continuing.*] Gentle in speech and action as in name?
Oh, it is this that makes a gentleman!
And Mr. Smith, although he kept a shop,
May very properly be so described.

PAULINE.

Yes, I know, dear. Everybody calls himself a gentleman nowadays, even the boy who cleans the boots. But I am not going to give in to these unhealthy modern ideas, and I am not going to visit Mrs. Smith. She is not in Society.

CLAUDE.

[*Off again on his high horse.*] What is Society? All noble men——

PAULINE.

[*Objecting.*] But Mr. Smith isn't a *nobleman*, Claude.

CLAUDE.

. . . And women, in whatever station born,
These, only these, make up "Society."

PAULINE.

[*Patiently.*] But that's such a dreadful misuse of words, dear. When one talks of "Society," one does not mean good people, or unselfish people, or high-minded people, but people who keep a carriage and give dinner parties. Those are the only things which really matter socially.

CLAUDE.

Pauline, Pauline, what dreadful sentiments!
They show a worldly and perverted mind.
I grieve to think my wife should utter them!

PAULINE.

[*Very sweetly.*] I wish, Claude, you'd try and give up talking in blank verse. It's very bad form. And it's very bad verse, too. Try and break yourself of it.

CLAUDE.

[*Off again.*] All noble thoughts, Pauline——

PAULINE.

No, no, no, Claude. I really can't have this ranting. Byronics are quite out of fashion.

CLAUDE.

[*Relapsing gloomily into prose.*] You may laugh at me, Pauline, but you know I'm right.

PAULINE.

Of course you're right, dear. Much too right for this wicked world. That's why I never can take your advice on any subject. You're so unpractical.

CLAUDE.

[*Breaking out again.*] The world, the world, oh, how I hate this world!

PAULINE.

Now that's silly of you, dear. There's nothing like making the best of a bad thing. By the way, Claude, didn't you say Mrs. Melnotte was coming to call this afternoon?

CLAUDE.

Yes. Dear mother, how nice it will be to see her again!

PAULINE.

It will be charming, of course. . . . I do hope no one else will call at the same time. Perhaps I'd better tell

James we are not at home to anyone except Mrs. Melnotte.

CLAUDE.

Oh, no, don't do that. My mother will enjoy meeting our friends.

PAULINE.

No doubt, dear. But will our friends enjoy meeting your mother? [*Seeing him about to burst forth again.*] Oh, yes, Claude, I know what you are going to say. But, after all, Lyons is a very purse-proud, vulgar place. You know, how *my* mother can behave on occasions! And if Mrs. Melnotte happens to be here when any other people call it may be very unpleasant. I really think I had better say we are not at home to anyone else.

[*Rises to ring the bell.*

CLAUDE.

Pauline, I forbid you! Sit down at once. If my family are not good enough for your friends, let them drop us and be hanged to them.

PAULINE.

Claude, don't storm. It's so vulgar. And there's not the least occasion for it either. I only thought it would be pleasanter for all our visitors—your dear mother

among the number—if we avoided all chance of disagreeable scenes. But there, dear, you've no *savoir faire*, and I'm afraid we shall never get into Society. It's very sad.

CLAUDE.

[*Touched by her patience.*] I am sorry, my dear. I ought to have kept my temper. But I wish you weren't so set upon getting into Society. Isn't it a little snobbish?

PAULINE.

[*Wilfully misunderstanding him.*] It's dreadfully snobbish, dear; the most snobbish sort of Society I know. All provincial towns are like that. But it's the only Society there is here, you know, and we must make the best of it.

CLAUDE.

My poor Pauline. [*Kissing her.*

PAULINE.

[*Gently.*] But you know, Claude, social distinctions do exist. Why not recognize them? And the late Mr. Melnotte *was* a gardener!

CLAUDE.

He was—an excellent gardener.

PAULINE.

One of the Lower Classes.

CLAUDE.

In a Republic there are no Lower Classes.

PAULINE.

[*Correcting him.*] In a Republic there are no Higher Classes. And class distinctions are more sharply drawn than ever in consequence.

CLAUDE.

So much the worse for the Republic.

PAULINE.

[*Shocked.*] Claude, I begin to think you are an anarchist.

CLAUDE.

I? [*Proudly.*] I am a colonel in the French army.

PAULINE.

But not a *real* colonel, Claude. Only a Republican colonel.

CLAUDE.

[*Sternly.*] I rose from the ranks in two years by merit.

PAULINE.

I know, dear. Real colonels only rise by interest.

[CLAUDE *gasps.*

JAMES.

[*Opening the door and showing in a wizened old lady in rusty black garments and a bonnet slightly awry.*] Mrs. Melnotte.

[PAULINE *goes forward to greet her.*

MRS. MELNOTTE.

[*Not seeing her.*] Ah, my dear son [*runs across the room to* CLAUDE *before the eyes of the deeply scandalised* JAMES, *and kisses him repeatedly*], how glad I am to see you again! And your grand house! And your fine servants! In livery, too!

[PAULINE *shudders, and so does* JAMES. *The latter goes out.*

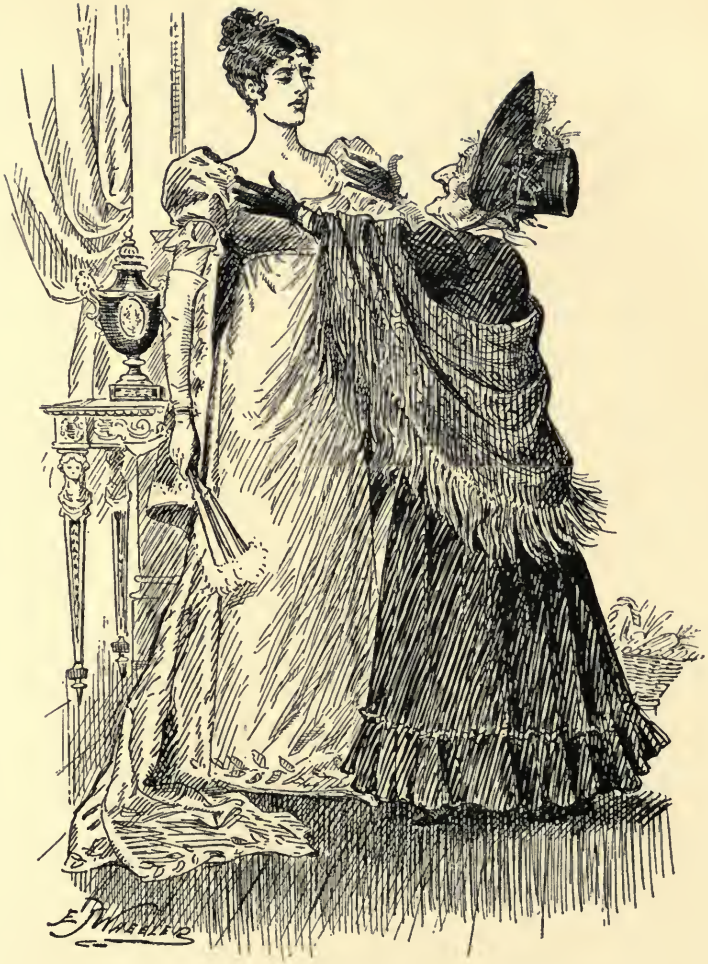
CLAUDE.

My dearest mother! [*Kisses her.*

MRS. MELNOTTE.

[*Beaming on Pauline.*] How do you do, my dear? Let me give my Claude's wife a kiss.

[*Does so in resounding fashion.*



"Let me give my Claude's wife a kiss."

PAULINE.

[*As soon as she has recovered from the warmth of this embrace.*] How do you do, Mrs. Melnotte? Won't you sit down?

MRS. MELNOTTE.

Thank you kindly, my dear. I don't mind if I do.

[*A ring is heard outside, followed by the sound of someone being admitted.* PAULINE *looks anxiously towards the door.*

PAULINE.

[*To herself.*] A visitor! How unlucky! I wonder who it is?

JAMES.

[*Throwing open the door.*] Mrs. Deschappelles.

PAULINE.

Great Heavens, my mother!

[*Falls back, overwhelmed, into her chair.*

MRS. DESCHAPPELLES.

[*In her most elaborate manner.*] My dear child, you are unwell. My coming has been a shock to you. But there, a daughter's affection, Claude—[*shaking hands with him*]—how wonderful it is!

PAULINE.

Dear mother, we are delighted to see you.

MRS. DESCHAPPELLES.

Of course I ought to have called before. I have been meaning to come ever since you returned from your honeymoon. But I have so many visits to pay; and you have only been back ten weeks!

PAULINE.

I quite understand, mother dear.

MRS. DESCHAPPELLES.

And, as I always say to your poor father, "When one is a leader of Society, one has so many engagements." I am sure *you* find that.

PAULINE.

I have hardly begun to receive visits yet.

MRS. DESCHAPPELLES.

No, dear? But then it's different with *you*. When you married Colonel Melnotte, of course you gave up all *social* ambitions.

MRS. MELNOTTE.

I am sure no one could wish for a better, braver husband than my Claude.

MRS. DESCHAPPELLES.

[*Turning sharply round and observing* MRS. MELNOTTE *for the first time.*] I beg your pardon? [*Icily.*

MRS. MELNOTTE.

[*Bravely.*] I said no one could have a better husband than Claude.

MRS. DESCHAPPELLES.

[*Dumbfounded, appealing to* PAULINE.] Who—who is this *person?*

PAULINE.

[*Nervously.*] I think you have met before, mother. This is Mrs. Melnotte.

MRS. DESCHAPPELLES.

[*Insolently.*] Oh! the gardener's wife.

CLAUDE.

[*Melodramatic at once.*] Yes. The gardener's wife and my mother!

MRS. DESCHAPPELLES.

[*Impatiently.*] Of course, I know the unfortunate relationship between you, Claude. You need not thrust it down my throat. You know how unpleasant it is to me.

PAULINE.

[*Shocked at this bad taste.*] Mother!

MRS. DESCHAPPELLES.

Oh, yes, it is. As I was saying to your poor father only yesterday. "Of course, Claude is all

right. He is an officer now, and all officers are supposed to be gentlemen. But his relatives are impossible, quite impossible!"

CLAUDE.

[*Furiously.*] This insolence is intolerable. Madame Deschappelles . . .

MRS. MELNOTTE.

[*Intervening.*] Claude, Claude, don't be angry! Remember who she is.

CLAUDE.

[*Savagely.*] I remember well enough. She is Madame Deschappelles, and her husband is a successful tradesman. He was an English shop-boy, and his proper name was Chapel. He came over to France, grew rich, put a "de" before his name, and now gives himself airs like the other *parvenus*.

MRS. DESCHAPPELLES.

Monster!

PAULINE.

My dear Claude, how wonderfully interesting!

MRS. MELNOTTE.

[*Rising.*] My son, you must not forget your manners. Mrs. Deschappelles is Pauline's mother. I will go away

now, and leave you to make your apologies to her. [CLAUDE *tries to prevent her going.*] No, no, I will go, really. Good-bye, my son; good-bye, dear Pauline.

[*Kisses her and goes out.*

MRS. DESCHAPPELLES.

If that woman imagines that I am going to stay here after being insulted by you as I have been, she is much mistaken. Please ring for my carriage. [CLAUDE *rings.*] As for you, Pauline, I always told you what would happen if you insisted on marrying beneath you, and now you see I'm right.

PAULINE.

[*Quietly.*] You seem to forget, mamma, that papa was practically a bankrupt when I married, and that Claude paid his debts.

MRS. DESCHAPPELLES.

I forget nothing. And I do not see that it makes the smallest difference. I am not blaming your poor father for having his debts paid by Colonel Melnotte; I am blaming you for marrying him. Good-bye.

[*She sweeps out in a towering passion.*

PAULINE.

Sit down, Claude, and don't glower at me like that. It's not my fault if mamma does not know how to behave.

CLAUDE.

[*Struggling with his rage.*] That's true, that's true.

PAULINE.

Poor mamma, her want of breeding is terrible! I have always noticed it. But that story about Mr. Chapel explains it all. Why didn't you tell it to me before?

CLAUDE.

I thought it would pain you.

PAULINE.

Pain me? I am delighted with it! Why, it explains everything. It explains *me*. It explains *you*, even. A Miss Chapel might marry *anyone*. Don't frown, Claude; laugh. We shall never get into Society in Lyons, but, at least, we shall never have another visit from mamma. The worst has happened. We can now live happily ever afterwards.

Curtain.

Caste.

Most people, in their day, have wept tears of relief at the ending of T. W. Robertson's comedy "Caste," when the Hon. George D'Alroy—not dead, poor chap!—falls into the arms of his wife, Esther, while his father-in-law, Eccles, bestows a drunken benediction upon him before starting for Jersey, and his sister-in-law, Polly, and her adored plumber, Gerridge, embrace sympathetically in the background. In these circumstances it seems hardly kind to add a further act to this harrowing drama. But the writer of Sequels, like Nemesis, is inexorable. If the perusal of the following scene prevents any young subaltern from emulating D'Alroy and marrying a ballet-dancer with a drunken father, it will not have been written in vain.

THE VENGEANCE OF CASTE.

SCENE.—*The dining-room of the* D'ALROYS' *house in the suburbs. Dinner is just over, and* GEORGE D'ALROY, *in a seedy coat and carpet slippers, is sitting by the fire smoking a pipe. On the other side of the fire sits* ESTHER, *his wife, darning a sock.*

ESTHER.

Tired, George?

GEORGE.

Yes.

ESTHER.

Had a bad day in the City?

GEORGE.

Beastly! I believe I'm the unluckiest beggar in the world. Every stock I touch goes down.

ESTHER.

Why don't you give up speculating if you're so unlucky?

GEORGE.

[*Hurt.*] I don't speculate, dear. I invest.

ESTHER.

Why don't you give up investing then? It makes a dreadful hole in our income.

GEORGE.

One must do *something* for one's living.

ESTHER.

[*Sighing.*] What a pity it is you left the Army!

GEORGE.

I had to. The regiment wouldn't stand your father. He was always coming to the mess-room when he was drunk, and asking for me. So the Colonel said I'd better send in my papers.

ESTHER.

[*Gently.*] Not *drunk*, George.

GEORGE.

The Colonel said so. And he was rather a judge.

ESTHER.

[*Unable to improve upon her old phrase.*] Father is a very eccentric man, but a very good man, when you know him.

GEORGE.

[*Grimly.*] If you mean by "eccentric" a man who is always drunk and won't die, he is—most eccentric!

ESTHER.

Hush, dear! After all, he's my father.

GEORGE.

That's my objection to him.

ESTHER.

I'm afraid you must have lost a *great* deal of money to-day!

GEORGE.

Pretty well. But I've noticed that retired military men who go into the City invariably do lose money.

ESTHER.

Why do they go into the City, then?

GEORGE.

[*Gloomily.*] Why, indeed?

[*There is a short pause.* GEORGE *stares moodily at the fire.*

ESTHER

I had a visit from your mother to-day.

GEORGE.

How was she?

ESTHER.

Not very well. She has aged sadly in the last few years. Her hair is quite white now.

GEORGE.

[*Half to himself.*] Poor mother, poor mother!

ESTHER.

She was very kind. She asked particularly after you, and she saw little George. [*Gently.*] I think she is getting more reconciled to our marriage.

GEORGE.

Do you really, dear? [*Looks at her curiously.*]

ESTHER.

Yes; and I think it's such a good thing. How strange it is that people should attach such importance to class distinctions!

GEORGE.

Forgive me, dear, but if you think it strange that the Marquise de St. Maur does not consider Mr. Eccles and the Gerridges wholly desirable connections, I am afraid I cannot agree with you.

Mr. Eccles makes his hundred and fifty-sixth appearance at the police court.

ESTHER.

Of course, Papa is a very eccentric man——

GEORGE.

My dear Esther, Mr. Eccles made his hundred and fifty-sixth appearance in the police-court last week. The fact was made the subject of jocular comment in the cheaper evening papers. The sentence was five shillings or seven days.

ESTHER.

Poor Papa felt his position acutely.

GEORGE.

Not half so acutely as I did. I paid the five shillings. If he had only consented to remain in Jersey!

ESTHER.

But you know Jersey didn't suit him. He was never well there.

GEORGE.

He was never sober there. That was the only thing that was the matter with him. No, my love, let us look facts in the face. You are a dear little woman, but your father is detestable, and there is not the smallest ground for hope that my mother will ever be "reconciled" to our marriage as long as she retains her reason.

ESTHER.

I suppose father *is* rather a difficulty.

GEORGE.

Yes. He and the Gerridges, between them, have made us impossible socially.

ESTHER.

What's the matter with the Gerridges?

GEORGE.

Nothing, except that you always ask them to all our dinner parties. And as gentlepeople have a curious prejudice against sitting down to dinner with a plumber and glazier, it somewhat narrows our circle of acquaintance.

ESTHER.

But Sam isn't a working plumber now. He has a shop of his own—quite a large shop. And their house is just as good as ours. The furniture is better. Sam bought Polly a new carpet for the drawing-room only last week. It cost fourteen pounds. And *our* drawing-room carpet is dreadfully shabby.

GEORGE.

I'm glad they're getting on so well. [*With a flicker of hope.*] Do you think there's any chance, as they grow more prosperous, of their "dropping" us?

ESTHER.

[*Indignantly.*] How can you think of such a thing!

GEORGE.

[*Sighing.*] I was afraid not.

ESTHER.

[*Enthusiastically.*] Why, Sam is as kind as can be, and so is Polly. And you know how fond they are of little George.

GEORGE.

Poor child, yes. He has played with their children ever since he could toddle. And what is the result? A Cockney accent that is indescribable.

ESTHER.

What does it matter about his accent so long as he is a good boy, and grows up to be a good man?

GEORGE.

Ethically, my dear, not at all. But practically, it matters a great deal. It causes me intense physical discomfort. And I think it is killing my mother.

ESTHER.

George!

GEORGE.

Moreover, when the time comes for him to go to a Public school he will probably be very unhappy in consequence.

ESTHER.

Why?

GEORGE.

Merely irrational prejudice. Public school boys dislike all deviations from the normal. And to them—happily—a pronounced Cockney accent represents the height of abnormality.

ESTHER.

[*Sadly.*] In spite of our marriage, I'm afraid you're still a worshipper of caste. I thought you turned your back on all that when you married me.

GEORGE.

So I did, dear, so I did. But I don't want to commit my son to the same hazardous experiment.

ESTHER.

Ah, George, you don't really love me, or you wouldn't talk like that.

GEORGE.

My dear, I love you to distraction. That's exactly the difficulty. I am torn between my devotion to you and

my abhorrence of your relations. When your father returned from Jersey, and took a lodging close by us, nothing but the warmth of my affection prevented me from leaving you for ever. He is still here, and so am I. What greater proof could you have of the strength of my attachment?

ESTHER.

Poor father! he could not bear to be away from us. And he has grown so fond of little George! [George *shudders.*] Father has a good heart.

GEORGE.

I wish he had a stronger head.

[*This remark is prompted by the sound of* MR. ECCLES *entering the front door, and having a tipsy altercation with the maid.*

MAID.

[*Announcing.*] Mr. Eccles.

ECCLES.

[*Joyously.*] Evening—hic—me children. Bless you, bless you!

ESTHER.

Good evening, father.

ECCLES.

Won't you—hic—speak to yer old father-in-law, Georgie? [GEORGE *says nothing.*] Ah, pride, pride, cruel pride! You come before a fall, *you* do! [*Lurches heavily against the table, and subsides into a chair.*] Funny, that! Almost—hic—seemed as if the proverb was a-coming true that time!

GEORGE.

[*Sternly.*] How often have I told you, Mr. Eccles, not to come to this house except when you're sober!

ECCLES.

[*Raising his voice in indignant protest.*] Shober—hic—perfectly shober! shober as a—hic—judge!

GEORGE.

I'm afraid I can't argue with you as to the precise stage of intoxication in which you find yourself. You had better go home at once.

ECCLES.

Do you hear that Esh—ter? Do you hear that—hic—me child?

ESTHER.

Yes, father. I think you had better go home. You're not very well to-night.

ECCLES.

[*Rising unsteadily from his chair.*] Allri—Esh—ter. I'm goin'. Good ni—Georgie.

GEORGE.

[*With the greatest politeness.*] Good night, Mr. Eccles. If you could possibly manage to fall down and damage yourself seriously on the way home, I should be infinitely obliged.

ECCLES.

[*Beginning to weep.*] There's words to address to a loving —hic—farrer-in-law. There's words——[*lurches out*].

ESTHER.

I think, George, you had better see him home. It's not safe for him to be alone in that state.

GEORGE.

[*Savagely.*] Safe! I don't want him to be safe. Nothing would give me greater satisfaction than to hear he had broken his neck.

ESTHER.

[*Gently.*] But he might meet a policeman, George.

GEORGE.

Ah! that's another matter. Perhaps I'd better see the beast into a cab.

ESTHER.

[*Sighing.*] Ah, you never understood poor father!

[*A crash is heard from the hall as* ECCLES *lurches heavily and upsets the hat-stand.* GEORGE *throws up his hands in despair at the wreck of the hall furniture—or, perhaps, at the obtuseness of his wife's last remark—and goes out to call a cab.*

Curtain.

Patience, or Bunthorne's Bride.

At the end of "Patience," it will be remembered, the twenty love-sick maidens gave up æstheticism and decided to marry officers of Dragoons. But a taste for intellectual gimcrackery is not so easily eradicated, and it is probable that the poor ladies neither liked nor were liked at Aldershot. That is certainly the impression conveyed by the following sequel.

OUT OF PATIENCE; OR, BUNTHORNE AVENGED.

SCENE.—*Drawing-room of* COLONEL CALVERLEY'S *house at Aldershot. His wife,* SAPHIR, *is entertaining* ANGELA, ELLA, *and the rest of the love-sick maidens—now married to stalwart officers of Dragoons—at afternoon tea. Each lady dandles a baby, which squalls intermittently.*

CHORUS.

Twenty heart-sick ladies we,
Living down at Aldershot,
Every morning fervently
Wishing, wishing we were not.

Twenty married ladies we,
And our fate we may not alter;
If we dare to mutiny
They will send us to Gibraltar!

[*The babies, appalled at this prospect, howl unanimously.*

SAPHIR.

[*As soon as she can make herself heard.*] Our mornings go in stilling baby's squalls.

ALL.

Ah, miserie!

SAPHIR.

Our afternoons in paying tiresome calls,

ALL.

And drinking tea!

SAPHIR.

And then those long, long, regimental balls!

ALL.

Ennuie, ennuie!

SAPHIR.

After a time that sort of pleasure palls,

ALL.

As you may see.

[*All yawn, including the babies.*

CHORUS.

Twenty heart-sick ladies we, etc.

ANGELA.

[*Sighs.*] It's a dreadful thing that we should *all* have married officers in the Army.

SAPHIR.

And *all* have to live at Aldershot.

ELLA.

All except Lady Jane.

SAPHIR.

But she married a Duke.

ELLA.

I don't see why that should make any difference.

ANGELA.

You wouldn't expect a Duchess to live in the provinces. She couldn't be spared.

ELLA

What do you mean?

ANGELA.

No Duchess is allowed to be out of London during the season. There are hardly enough of them to go round as it is.

SAPHIR.

I never imagined that when we were married we should find ourselves so completely "out of it."

ALL.

[*Indignantly.*] Out of it!

SAPHIR.

Yes, out of it. Out of the world, the fashion, what you please. Æstheticism is out of vogue now, of course,

but there have been lots of fascinating "movements" since then. There's been Ibsen and the Revolt of the Daughters, and Aubrey Beardsley and the Decadence, and Maeterlinck. The world has been through all these wonderfully thrilling phases since 1880, and where are WE?

ANGELA.

[*Remonstrating.*] We read about them in the ladies' papers.

SAPHIR.

Read about them! What's the good of *reading* about them? I want to be *in* them. I want to LIVE MY LIFE.

[*Shakes her baby fiercely. It raises a howl.*

ELLA.

[*Rushing to the rescue.*] Take care, take care! Poor darling! it'll have a fit.

SAPHIR.

Take it, then. [*Throws it to Ella.*] I'm tired of it. What's the good of buying a complete set of back numbers of the *Yellow Book*, and *reading* them, too—[*general astonishment at this feat*]—if you can't even shake your baby without making it squall? I'd never have married Colonel Calverley if I had thought of that!

"I want to live my life."

ANGELA.

Nor I Major Murgatroyd.

[*Sings.*]

When first I consented to wed,
I said, "I shall never come down
To passing my life
As an officer's wife,
In a second-rate garrison town."
I said, "I shall live in Mayfair,
With plenty of money to spare,
Have admirers in flocks,
Wear adorable frocks,
And diamonds everywhere."
Yes, that's what I certainly said
When first I consented to wed.

I thought, on the day I was wed,
I could reckon with perfect propriety
On filling a place
With conspicuous grace
In the smartest of London Society.
I said, "It is easy to see
I shall be at the top of the tree,
And none of the millions
Of vulgar civilians

Will venture to patronise me!"
Yes, that's what I foolishly said
When first I consented to wed.

[*As the song ends, enter* Colonel Calverley, Major Murgatroyd, *and the other officers in uniform as from parade. The ladies groan. So do the babies.*

Colonel.

Hullo! Groans! What's all this about?

Saphir.

If you only knew how it pains us to see you in those preposterous clothes!

Officers.

Preposterous!

Angela.

Perfectly preposterous. You know they are.

Major.

If by preposterous you mean not conspicuously well adapted for active service, we cannot deny it.

Angela.

Of course you can't. Your uniforms are useless and pretentious. To the educated eye they are not even beautiful.

OFFICERS.

[*Horrified.*] Not beautiful!

SAPHIR.

Certainly not. If they were, you would not be so unwilling to be seen about in them.

COLONEL.

[*Haughtily.*] It is not etiquette in the British Army for an officer *ever* to be seen in his uniform. It isn't done!

SAPHIR.

And why not? Because he is ashamed of it. He wants to be dressed like a soldier, not like a mountebank. How can anyone respect a uniform that's only meant for show?

MAJOR.

That's true. But the ladies? If it wasn't for our gorgeous frippery they wouldn't fall in love with us.

ANGELA.

[*Crossly.*] Nonsense! Women like soldiers because they are brave, not because they wear red coats. Any Tommy could tell you that.

COLONEL.

[*Sarcastically.*] Indeed?

ANGELA.

Yes. Saphir, tell Colonel Calverley the story of William Stokes.

SAPHIR.

[*Sings.*] Once William Stokes went forth to woo,
A corporal, he, of the Horse Guards (Blue),
He thought all housemaid hearts to storm
With his truly magnificent uniform.
But the housemaids all cried "No, no, no,
Your uniform's only meant for show,
Your gorgeous trappings are wicked waste,
And your whole get-up's in the worst of taste."

ALL.

The worst of taste?

SAPHIR.

The worst of taste!
These quite unfeeling,
Very plain-dealing
Ladies cried in haste—
"Your uniform, Billy,
Is simply silly
And quite in the worst of taste!"

Poor William took these cries amiss,
Being quite unaccustomed to snubs like this.
At last he explained, by way of excuse,
His gorgeous clothes weren't made for use.
His elaborate tunic was much too tight
To eat his dinner in, far less fight;
It was only meant to attract the eye
Of the less intelligent passer-by.

ALL.

The passer-by?

SAPHIR.

The passer-by!
And so poor Billy,
Feeling quite silly,
Threw up the Horse Guards (Blue),
And now in the Park he
Appears in khaki,
And greatly prefers it too!

COLONEL.

That's all very well, and I daresay you're right in what you say, but you'll never get the War Office to see it.

MAJOR.

They're too stupid.

SAPHIR.

Was it the War Office who sent us to Aldershot?

MAJOR.

Yes.

SAPHIR.

You're quite right. They *are* stupid!

COLONEL.

What's the matter with Aldershot?

ANGELA.

It's dull, it's philistine, it's conventional. And to think that we were once Æsthetic!

OFFICERS.

[*Mockingly.*] Oh, South Kensington!

ANGELA.

[*Angrily.*] *Not* South Kensington! Chelsea. If you knew anything at all, you'd know that South Kensington is quite over now. People of culture have all moved to Chelsea.

SAPHIR.

Why on earth don't you all get promoted to snug berths at the Horse Guards? Then we could live in London.

COLONEL.

[*Sadly.*] Do you know how promotion is got in the British Army?

SAPHIR.

No.

COLONEL.

Listen, and I will tell you—

[*Sings.*]

When you once have your commission, if you want a high position in the Army of the King,
You must tout for the affections of the influential sections of the Inner Social Ring.
If you're anxious for promotion, you must early get a notion of the qualities commanders prize;
You must learn to play at polo, strum a banjo, sing a solo, and you're simply bound to rise!
For every one will say,
In the usual fatuous way:
"If this young fellow's such a popular figure in High Society,
Why, what a very competent commander of a troop this fine young man must be!"

You must buy expensive suits, wear the shiniest of boots, and a glossy hat and tall,
For if you're really clever you need practically never wear your uniform at all.

You probably will then see as little of your men as you
decently can do,
And you'll launch a thousand sneers at those foolish
Volunteers, who are not a bit like you!
And those Volunteers will say,
When you go on in that way:
"If this young man's such an unconcealed contempt for
the likes of such as we,
What a genius at strategy and tactics too this fine
young man must be!"

When, your blunders never noted, you are rapidly
promoted to the snuggest berth you know,
Till we see you at Pall Mall with the Army gone to—
well, where the Army should not go—
When your country goes to war your abilities will awe
all the foemen that beset her,
And if you make a mess of it, of course we're told the
less of it the country hears the better!
And you'll hear civilians say,
In their usual humble way:
"If this old buffer is a General of Division, and also a
G.C.B.,
Why, what a past master of the art of war this fine old
boy must be!"

SAPHIR.

Do you mean that you'll never get berths at the Horse Guards, any of you?

COLONEL.

[*Sadly.*] It's most unlikely.

SAPHIR.

Then my patience is exhausted. I shall apply for a judicial separation.

ANGELA.

So shall I.

LADIES.

We shall all apply for judicial separations.

OFFICERS.

Impossible!

ANGELA.

Oh, yes, we shall; we cannot consent to remain at Aldershot any longer. At any moment a new movement in the world of Art or Letters may begin in London, and WE shall not be in it. The thought is unendurable. We must go and pack at once.

[*Exeunt.*

Curtain.

The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.

After the second Mrs. Tanqueray killed herself at the end of the play which bears her name, it might be supposed that her husband would be content with his two successive failures in matrimony, and not tempt a third. But Aubrey, as his second marriage shows, was nothing if not courageous in matrimonial affairs, and we have therefore every reason to believe that he did marry again, while we have small ground for hoping that he chose his third wife with any greater wisdom than he chose the other two. That is the impression conveyed by the following pathetic scene.

THE THIRD MRS. TANQUERAY.

SCENE.—*The dining-room of* AUBREY TANQUERAY'S *country house, Highercombe, in Surrey. A lean butler is standing at the sideboard.* AUBREY *and* CAYLEY DRUMMLE *enter and go up to warm themselves at the fire, which burns feebly. The time is an evening in March, five years after the events of Mr. Pinero's play, and* CAYLEY *looks quite five years stouter.* AUBREY *does not.*

CAYLEY.

It's quite shocking, Aubrey, that you should have been married nearly a year, and that I should not yet have had the pleasure of making Mrs. Tanqueray's acquaintance. I am dying to know her.

AUBREY.

My fault, my dear Cayley.

CAYLEY.

Entirely. Your weddings are always so furtive.

[*Pokes the fire resolutely, in the hope of producing something approaching a cheerful blaze.*

AUBREY.

Well, you'll see her to-night. I hoped she would be able to dine at home, but she had promised to address a Temperance meeting in the village. [CAYLEY *looks dubious.*] However, she'll be back at ten. Meanwhile, you'll have to be contented with a bachelor dinner.

[*They go to the table and sit down.*

CAYLEY.

[*Unfolding serviette.*] Experience has taught me, my dear Aubrey, that bachelor dinners are apt to be particularly well worth eating. No doubt it is to make up for the absence of more charming society.

AUBREY.

[*Doubtfully.*] I hope it will prove so in this case.

CAYLEY.

I feel sure of it. I remember your cook of old.

AUBREY.

I'm afraid it won't be *that* cook.

CAYLEY.

[*In horror.*] You haven't parted with him?

AUBREY.

Yes. He left soon after my marriage. There was some small error in his accounts, which Mrs. Tanqueray discovered. So, of course, we had to dismiss him.

CAYLEY.

[*Eagerly.*] Do you happen to have his address?

AUBREY.

I dare say Mrs. Tanqueray has, if you wish to know it.

[*Footman hands soup.*

CAYLEY.

I shall be eternally indebted to her.

AUBREY.

Why?

CAYLEY.

I shall engage him at once. [*Begins to eat his soup, frowns, and then puts down his spoon.*] But I'm afraid you'll want him back yourself.

AUBREY.

No. My wife is most particular about the character of her servants.

CAYLEY.

Ah! I'm more particular about the character of my soup.

[*His hand goes out instinctively towards his sherry-glass. As he is about to raise it he sees that it is empty, and refrains.*

AUBREY.

Cayley, you ought to marry. Then you'd realise that there are more important things in the world than soup.

CAYLEY.

Of course there are, my dear fellow. There's the fish and the joint.

[*Fish of an unattractive kind is handed to him. He takes some.*

AUBREY.

Sybarite!

[CAYLEY *looks at his fish dubiously, then leaves it untasted.*

CAYLEY.

You are quite wrong. A simple cut of beef or mutton, well-cooked, is quite enough for me.

BUTLER.

[*To* CAYLEY.] Lemonade, Sir?

CAYLEY.

Eh, what? No, thank you.

AUBREY.

Ah, Cayley. What will you drink? [CAYLEY'S *face brightens visibly.*] I'm afraid I can't offer you any wine. [*It falls again.*] My wife never allows alcohol at her table. But there are various sorts of mineral waters. You don't mind?

CAYLEY.

[*Grimly.*] Not at all, my dear fellow, not at all. Which brand of mineral water do you consider most—ah—stimulating?

AUBREY.

[*Laughing mirthlessly.*] I'm afraid, Cayley, you're not a convert to Temperance principles yet. That shows you have never heard my wife speak.

CAYLEY.

[*Emphatically.*] Never! Temperance meetings are not in my line.

[*Footman removes his plate.*

AUBREY.

Perhaps some of the other movements in which she is interested would appeal to you more. [*With a touch of*

happy pride.] As you may know, my wife is a vice-president of the Anti-Vaccination Society, and of the Woman's Home Rule Union. Indeed, she is in great request on all public platforms.

CAYLEY.

[*With simulated enthusiasm.*] I feel sure of that, my dear Aubrey. [*Footman hands* CAYLEY *some rice-pudding.* CAYLEY *puts up his eye-glass, and eyes it curiously.*] What is this?

FOOTMAN.

Rice-pudding, Sir.

[CAYLEY *drops spoon hastily.*

AUBREY.

[*Politely.*] You're eating nothing, Cayley.

CAYLEY.

[*With some concern.*] Aubrey, have I *slept* through the joint? I have no recollection of eating it. If, in a moment of abstraction, I refused it, may I change my mind?

AUBREY.

[*Sternly.*] My wife never has *meat* at her table on Fridays.

CAYLEY.

[*Peevishly.*] My dear fellow, I wish you'd thought of mentioning it before I came down. Then I might

have had a more substantial luncheon. Where's that rice-pudding?

[*Helps himself. There is a rather constrained silence.*

AUBREY.

It's really very good of you to have come down to see us, Cayley.

CAYLEY.

[*Pulling himself together.*] Very good of you to say so, my dear chap.

[*Tackles his rice-pudding manfully.*

AUBREY.

My wife and I can so seldom get any man to drop in to dinner nowadays.

CAYLEY.

[*Giving up his struggle with rice-pudding in despair.*] I suppose so.

AUBREY.

In fact, we see very little society now.

CAYLEY.

[*Sententiously.*] Society only likes people who feed it, my dear Aubrey. You ought to have kept that cook.

AUBREY.

[*Meditatively.*] So my daughter said.

CAYLEY.

Ellean? Is she with you now?

AUBREY.

No. She is in Ireland. After making that remark she went back to her convent.

CAYLEY.

[*Heartily.*] Sensible girl! I like Ellean.

AUBREY.

She and my wife did not get on, somehow. It was very unfortunate, as it was mainly on Ellean's account that I thought it right to marry again.

CAYLEY.

[*With polite incredulity.*] Indeed?

AUBREY.

Yes. You see, it is so difficult for a girl of Ellean's retiring disposition to meet people and make friends when she has no mother to chaperon her. And if she meets no one, how is she to get married? Dessert, Cayley?

CAYLEY.

[*After surveying a rather unattractive assortment of apples and walnuts.*] No, thanks. As you were saying ——?

AUBREY.

So I thought if I could meet with a really suitable person, someone with whom she would be in sympathy, someone she would look upon as a sort of second mother ——

CAYLEY.

[*Correcting him.*] Third, Aubrey.

AUBREY.

[*Ignoring the interruption*]——it would make home more comfortable for her.

CAYLEY.

[*Laughing.*] I like your idea of *comfort*, Aubrey! But I should have thought you could have adopted some less extreme measure for providing Ellean with a chaperon? You have neighbours. Mrs. Cortelyon, for instance?

AUBREY.

[*Stiffly.*] Mrs. Cortelyon's chaperonage was not very successful on the last occasion.

CAYLEY.

No, no; to be sure. Young Ardale. I was forgetting.

AUBREY.

Unhappily the whole scheme was a failure. Ellean conceived a violent aversion for Mrs. Tanqueray almost

directly we came home, and a week later—I remember it was directly after dinner—she announced her intention of leaving the house for ever.

CAYLEY.

[*The thought of his dinner still rankling.*] Poor girl! No doubt she's happier in her convent.

[*Butler enters with coffee.* CAYLEY *takes some.*

AUBREY.

I am sorry I can't ask you to smoke, Cayley, but my wife has a particular objection to tobacco. She is a member of the Anti-tobacco League, and often speaks at its meetings.

CAYLEY.

[*Annoyed.*] Really, my dear fellow, if I may neither eat, drink, nor smoke, I don't quite see why you asked me down.

AUBREY.

[*Penitently.*] I suppose I ought to have thought of that. The fact is, I have got so used to these little deprivations that now I hardly notice them. Of course, it 's different with you.

CAYLEY.

I should think it was!

"She announced her intention of leaving the house for ever."

AUBREY.

[*Relenting.*] If you *very* much want to smoke, I dare say it might be managed. If we have this window wide open, and you sit by it, a cigarette might not be noticed.

CAYLEY.

[*Shortly.*] Thanks.

[*Takes out cigarette, and lights it, as soon as* AUBREY *has made the elaborate arrangements indicated above.*

AUBREY.

[*Politely.*] I hope you won't find it cold.

CAYLEY.

[*Grimly.*] England in March is always cold. [*Sneezes violently.*] But, perhaps, if you ring for my overcoat, I may manage to survive the evening.

AUBREY.

Certainly. What is it like?

CAYLEY.

I've no idea. It's an ordinary sort of coat. Your man will know it if you ring for him.

AUBREY.

[*Hesitating.*] I'd rather fetch it for you myself, if you don't mind. I should not like Parkes to see that you were smoking. It would set such a bad example.

CAYLEY.

[*Throwing his cigarette on to the lawn in a rage, and closing the window with a shiver.*] Don't trouble. I'll smoke in the train. By-the-way, what time *is* my train?

AUBREY.

Your train?

CAYLEY.

Yes. I must get back to town, my dear fellow.

AUBREY.

Nonsense! You said you'd stay a week.

CAYLEY.

Did I? Then I didn't know what I was saying. I must get back to-night.

AUBREY.

But you brought a bag.

CAYLEY.

Only to dress, Aubrey. By the way, will you tell your man to pack it?

AUBREY.

You can't go to-night. The last train leaves at 9.30. It's 9.15 now.

CAYLEY.

[*Jumping up.*] Then I must start at once. Send my bag after me.

AUBREY.

You've not a chance of catching it.

CAYLEY.

[*Solemnly.*] My dear old friend, I shall return to town to-night if I have to walk!

AUBREY.

[*Detaining him.*] But my wife? You haven't even made her acquaintance yet. She'll think it so strange.

CAYLEY.

Not half so strange as I have thought her dinner. [*Shaking himself free.*] No, Aubrey, this is really good-bye. I like you very much, and it cuts me to the heart to have to drop your acquaintance; but nothing in the world would induce me to face another dinner such as I have had to-night!

AUBREY.

Cayley!

CAYLEY.

[*Making for the door.*] And nothing in the world would induce me to be introduced to the third Mrs. Tanqueray.

[*Exit hurriedly.*

Curtain.

The Lady from the Sea.

When Ibsen ended "The Lady from the Sea" by making Mrs. Wangel give up her idea of eloping with "The Stranger" and decide to remain with her husband and her step-children, many people must have felt that there was a want of finality about the arrangement. Having discussed so exhaustively with Dr. Wangel the advisability of leaving him, she could hardly be expected to give up the project permanently. The play is therefore one which emphatically calls for a sequel.

THE LADY ON THE SEA.

SCENE I.—*Beside the pond in the* WANGELS' *garden. It is a malarious evening in September.* HILDA *and* BOLETTA, MRS. WANGEL'S *step-daughters, are, as usual, failing to catch the carp which are said to haunt the pond.*

BOLETTA.

Do you think *she* [*nodding towards* MRS. WANGEL, *who prowls to and fro on the damp lawn with a shawl over her head*] is any better?

HILDA.

No, worse.

BOLETTA.

[*Cheerfully.*] Oh, she can't be worse.

HILDA.

That's all very well for you. You're going to be married. It doesn't matter to you *how* mad she is! You'll be out of it before long.

BOLETTA.

[*Jubilantly.*] Yes, I shall be out of it.

HILDA.

But I shan't. [*Darkly.*] However, perhaps she'll go away soon.

BOLETTA.

Papa still thinks of moving to the sea-side then?

HILDA.

[*Crossly.*] Oh, Papa—Papa never thinks!

BOLETTA.

Hush, Hilda. What dreadful things you say!

HILDA.

[*Grimly.*] Not half so dreadful as the things I should like to do.

BOLETTA.

Hilda!

HILDA.

Oh, yes, I should. And I *will* when I grow up. I'll make Master-builder Solnes tumble off one of his own steeples. Think of that now!

BOLETTA.

What a horrid child you are! And just when I thought you were beginning to get on better with *her* too! [*Nodding toward* MRS. WANGEL.] It's most provoking.

HILDA.

I call it perfectly thrilling, myself. But here she comes. [MRS. WANGEL *approaches.*] Go away. I want to talk to her. [*Exit* BOLETTA *doubtfully.*] How are you to-day, Mother?

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Absently.*] Eh?

HILDA.

[*Controlling her impatience.*] I asked how you were.

MRS. WANGEL.

But you called me mother. I'm not your mother. I'm only your step-mother.

HILDA.

But I can't address you as step-mother. "People don't do those things," as dear Hedda Gabler always says.

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Whose attention is clearly wandering.*] I suppose they don't.

HILDA.

Mother, have you seen *him?*

MRS. WANGEL.

I believe Wangel is in the surgery.

HILDA.

I don't mean Papa. What does it matter where Papa is! I mean The Stranger. The English steamer is at the pier. It arrived last night. [*Looks at* MRS. WANGEL *meaningly.*]

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Vaguely.*] Is it, dear? You astonish me.

HILDA.

You will go and see him, won't you?

MRS. WANGEL.

Oh, of course, of course.

HILDA.

I think it must be so perfectly thrilling to go down all by one's self to a steamer to see a strange man who is not one's husband.

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Recalling with difficulty her old phrase.*] Oh, yes—yes. It allures me wonderfully.

HILDA.

I should go at once, if I were you, before Papa comes out.

MRS. WANGEL.

Don't you think I ought to tell Wangel? I have always been accustomed to consult him before eloping with anyone else.

HILDA.

I think not. You must go of your own free will. You see, Papa might *urge* you to go. And then it would not be altogether your own will that sent you, would it? It would be partly his.

MRS. WANGEL.

So it would.

HILDA.

Isn't it splendid to think of your going away with him to-night, quite, quite away, across the sea?

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Doubtfully.*] Yes.

HILDA.

You know you always like the sea. You talk so much about it. It *allures* you, you know.

MRS. WANGEL.

Yes, the idea of it is wonderfully alluring. [*With misgiving.*] But I've never been *on* the sea.

HILDA.

[*Enthusiastically.*] That's what makes the idea so thrilling. It will be quite a new sensation! The sea is so fresh and buoyant, you know! So *rough!* Not like these vapid fiords where it's always calm. Quite different altogether.

MRS. WANGEL.

Ah, there's Wangel. [*Enter* DR. WANGEL.

HILDA.

Bother!

[*She returns to her fishing for the carp, which are never caught.*

DR. WANGEL.

Ah, Ellida, is that you?

MRS. WANGEL.

Yes, Wangel.

DR. WANGEL.

Not brooding, I trust, dear? Not letting your mind dwell on The Stranger, eh?

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Always ready to adopt an idea from any quarter.*] Of course, Wangel, I never can quite get the idea of The Stranger out of my mind.

"Not brooding, I trust, dear?"

DR. WANGEL.

[*Shaking his head.*] Silly girl, silly girl. And the sea, too? Still full of the sea?

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Taking up the cue at once.*] Ah, the sea, the wonderful, changeful sea! So fresh and buoyant, you know! So rough! Not like these vapid fiords. I had a child whose eyes were like the sea.

DR. WANGEL.

[*Testily.*] I assure you, Ellida, you are wrong. The child's eyes were just like other children's eyes. All children's eyes are. [HILDA *suppresses a slight giggle.* WANGEL *notices her for the first time.*] Fishing, Hilda?

HILDA.

[*Darkly.*] Yes, Papa. Trying to hook a silly old carp. I think I shall catch her in the end.

DR. WANGEL.

[*With interest.*] What bait do you use?

HILDA.

Oh, I have been very careful about the *bait.* My fish rose to it at once.

DR. WANGEL.

Well, well, I must go back to the surgery. Goodbye, Ellida; and, mind, no brooding about the sea!

[*Exit.*

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Ecstatically.*] Oh, the sea, the sea!

HILDA.

Yes, you'll be on it soon. Won't it be thrilling? I really think you ought to start at once.

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Helplessly.*] I suppose I ought to pack a few things first?

HILDA.

I wouldn't mind about that if I were you. I'd go down to the ship just as I was, slip on board without being noticed, and hide until I was well outside the fiord and began to feel the *real* sea heaving under me!

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Nervously.*] Shall I like that?

HILDA.

Of course you will. It's your native element, you know. You always said so. Before you've been on it

half an hour you'll wish you were overboard, you'll like the sea so!

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Fired by this vicarious enthusiasm.*] I shall, I know I shall. *He* will be there too! And he's so frightfully alluring. I must go at once.

[*Exit hurriedly by the garden gate.*

HILDA.

[*Giggling joyously.*] Caught, by Jove! My fish caught! She'll go off with her second mate on the English steamer, and never come back any more. What a triumph for my bait!

[*Picks up fishing tackle, and exit into the house in high good humour.*

SCENE II.—*The deck of the English steamer. The vessel has got outside the shelter of the fiord, and is beginning to pitch a little in the long sea rollers.* MRS. WANGEL *is discovered groping her way cautiously up the companion in the darkness.*

MRS. WANGEL.

This motion is very disagreeable—[*The vessel gives a very heavy lurch*]—*most* disagreeable! I wonder if I could

speak to The Stranger now? Hilda said I ought to wait till we were out at sea. Oh! [*The vessel gives another lurch.*]

A STEWARD.

[*Passing.*] Did you call?

MRS. WANGEL.

No—er—that is, yes. Will you send Mr. Johnston to me.

STEWARD.

There's no one of that name among the passengers, Madam.

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Fretfully.*] Mr. Johnston isn't a passenger. Mr. Johnston is the second mate. [*The vessel lurches again.*] Oh, oh!

STEWARD.

[*Looking suspiciously at her.*] But the second mate's name is Brown.

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Under her breath.*] Another *alias!* [*Aloud.*] It's the same person. Will you ask him to come to me?

STEWARD.

Very well, Madam. [*To himself.*] Queer, that! Wants to see the second mate, and don't remember his name.

But, there, what can you expect on these excursion steamers! [*Exit.*

MRS. WANGEL.

[*As the boat gets further out to sea and begins to roll heavily.*] This is horrible. I begin to think I don't like the sea at all. I feel positively ill. And I always thought the motion would be so exhilarating. It doesn't exhilarate *me* in the least. I wish Johnston would come —or Brown, I mean Brown. Perhaps he could find somewhere for me to lie down.

[BROWN—*or* JOHNSTON—*accompanied by the* STEWARD, *comes up the hatchway. He is the same disreputable looking seaman whose acquaintance the reader of "The Lady from the Sea" has already made.*

STEWARD.

This is the lady. [*Indicating* MRS. WANGEL.]

BROWN.

[*In his most nautical manner.*] I know that you swob. Haven't I eyes? Get out. [*Exit* STEWARD.] Well, woman, what do you want?

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Faintly, too much overcome by the rolling of the vessel to resent his roughness.*] I—I have come to you.

BROWN.

So I see.

MRS. WANGEL

Don't you want me, Alfred?

BROWN.

My name isn't Alfred. It's John.

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Plaintively.*] It *used* to be Alfred.

BROWN.

Well, now it's John.

MRS. WANGEL.

Are you—glad to see me?

BROWN.

[*Briskly.*] Not a bit. Never was so sorry to see a woman in my life.

MRS. WANGEL.

[*In horror.*] But you came for me. You said you wanted me.

BROWN.

I know I did. Thought old Quangle-Wangle would buy me off if I put the screw on. He didn't see it. Stingy old cuss!

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Appalled at this way of speaking of her husband.*] But you never asked Dr. Wangel for anything?

BROWN.

No fear. Too old a hand for that. He'd have put me in prison for trying to extort money.

MRS. WANGEL.

How could you expect him to give you money if you didn't ask for it?

BROWN.

I didn't suppose he was an absolute fool. When a man has a crazy wife he can't be such a born natural as to suppose that another man really wants her to go away with him. He wants the price of a drink. That's what *he* wants. But old Quangle-Wangle was too clever for me. He wouldn't part.

MRS. WANGEL.

Wouldn't part husband and wife, you mean?

BROWN.

No, I don't, and you know I don't. Wouldn't part with the dibs; that's what *I* mean.

MRS. WANGEL.

[*As the vessel gives a big roll*]. Oh, I'm going to be very ill indeed. Why did I think I should like the sea?

BROWN.

Why, indeed? *I* don't know. Dash me if I do. Mad, I suppose.

MRS. WANGEL.

What am I to do now?

BROWN.

Go back to old Quangle, if he'll take you. He's fool enough, I dare say.

MRS. WANGEL.

But I can't. We're out at sea. I can't get back now. I think I'm going to die. [*She sinks upon a seat.*

BROWN.

Die? You won't die. No such luck. You're going to be sea-sick, you are. Where's your cabin?

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Feebly.*] I don't know.

BROWN.

Where's your luggage? Hand me over your keys.

MRS. WANGEL.

I haven't any luggage.

BROWN.

Bilked again, s'help me! And not so much as a half a sovereign on you, I suppose?

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Feeling limply in her pocket.*] No. I must have left my purse at home.

BROWN.

Well, I'm——! [*He looks sourly at her.*

MRS. WANGEL.

[*Growing frightened.*] What are you going to do with me?

BROWN.

Do with you? Send you back to Quangle by the first steamer, of course. You'll have to work your passage back as stewardess. Heaven help the passengers!

[*He stalks to the hatchway and disappears.* MRS. WANGEL, *with a groan, resigns herself to sea-sickness.*

Curtain.

Cæsar and Cleopatra.

It might have been thought that Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra" rather than Mr. Bernard Shaw's "Cæsar and Cleopatra" demanded a dramatic sequel, but as Mr. Shaw has pointed out repeatedly that he is the greater dramatist of the two, his play has been chosen in preference to Shakespeare's. A prefatory essay proving—at great length—that the dialogue of this sequel is true to life, and is in fact substantially a reproduction of what was spoken in the year B.C. 31, *has been omitted for lack of space.*

OCTAVIAN AND CLEOPATRA.

SCENE.—*An extravagantly furnished apartment in the Palace at Alexandria.* CLEOPATRA *is discovered seated upon her throne. She is dressed with mournful splendour, as befits a queen who has been defeated at Actium and has suffered a recent bereavement. Her face is as attractive as a liberal use of cosmetics can make it, and her whole appearance is that of a middle-aged and rather dissipated member of the corps de ballet who has gone into half-mourning because the manager has reduced her salary.* CHARMIAN, *a pretty, shrewish-looking damsel, is in attendance on her.*

CLEOPATRA.

[*Nervously.*] Am I looking my best, Charmian?

CHARMIAN.

[*Sulkily.*] Your majesty is looking as well as *I* can make you. If you are not satisfied you had better get another maid.

CLEOPATRA.

[*Looking at herself in hand mirror.*] Silly child! Of course I am satisfied. I think you are wonderful.

CHARMIAN.

[*Mollified.*] Yes. I think I've not done so badly.

CLEOPATRA.

Of course, with Antony not even buried yet, it would hardly have done for me to be *too* magnificent.

CHARMIAN.

[*Decidedly*]. Most unsuitable.

CLEOPATRA.

As it is, I think we've arrived at a rather successful blend of splendour and sorrow, suggesting at once the afflicted widow and the queen who is open to consolation.

CHARMIAN.

That is certainly the impression we intended to convey. By the way, when does Cæsar arrive?

CLEOPATRA.

Octavian? Almost at once.

CHARMIAN.

His first visit, isn't it?

CLEOPATRA.

Yes. So much depends on a first impression. [*Looks at mirror again.*] I think we shall captivate him.

CHARMIAN.

[*Dubiously.*] He's not very impressionable, I hear.

CLEOPATRA.

No. But I shall manage it. Think how completely I fascinated Julius.

CHARMIAN.

His uncle? I'm afraid that's hardly a reason why you should prove equally attractive to the nephew.

CLEOPATRA.

My dear child, why not?

CHARMIAN.

Well—the lapse of time, you know That was seventeen years ago.

CLEOPATRA.

So long? I am really very well preserved.

CHARMIAN

Considering the wear and tear.

CLEOPATRA.

My good Charmian, how crudely you put things. I declare I've a good mind to have you executed.

CHARMIAN.

[*Tranquilly.*] Your majesty will hardly do that. I am the only person in Egypt who really understands the secret of your majesty's complexion.

CLEOPATRA.

That's true. But you ought to be more tactful.

CHARMIAN.

[*Tossing her head.*] You can't expect me to display tact when my wages haven't been paid since the battle of Actium.

CLEOPATRA.

Poor child! Never mind, when Octavian is at my feet you shall be paid [*meaningly*] in full! Will that satisfy you?

CHARMIAN.

I'd much rather have something on account.

CLEOPATRA.

I wish you wouldn't vex me in this way just when it's so important that I should look my best. You know how unbecoming temper is to a woman when she is . . . well, over thirty [*beginning to cry*].

CHARMIAN.

There, there! I'm sorry I said anything to hurt you. Don't cry, for Heaven's sake, or that rouge will run.

Then I shall have to go all over you again. Dry your eyes, there's a good creature. [CLEOPATRA *does so obediently.*] I declare you're all in streaks. Come here, and let me put you straight.

[CLEOPATRA *goes to* CHARMIAN, *who produces powder-puff, etc., and repairs the ravages of emotion.*

CLEOPATRA.

Quick, quick! They're coming. I hear them. I'm glad he's so early. Only a quarter of an hour after his time. [*Proudly*] That shows how eager he is to see me! I feel that this is going to be another of my triumphs.

[CHARMIAN *puts the finishing touch to the* QUEEN *just as* CÆSAR *enters. She then hastily conceals powder-puff, etc., behind her.* CLEOPATRA *has no time to return to the throne, and stands rather awkwardly with* CHARMIAN *to receive her visitors. These prove to be* OCTAVIAN, *a pale, dyspeptic-looking young man of about thirty;* AGRIPPA, *a bluff, thickset, red-faced warrior past middle age, and a guard of Roman soldiers.*

OCTAVIAN.

[*Looking round the gorgeous apartment with much disgust, and speaking in a soft, weary voice.*] Ugh! Bad taste, very bad taste all this.

AGRIPPA.

You know what these barbarians are. [*To the two women.*] Kindly inform the Queen Cæsar is here.

CLEOPATRA.

[*Advancing.*] *I* am the Queen. How do you do?

AGRIPPA.

You! Nonsense!

CLEOPATRA.

[*Archly.*] Oh, yes, I am.

OCTAVIAN.

[*With gentle melancholy.*] Dear, dear, another illusion gone!

CLEOPATRA.

Illusion?

OCTAVIAN.

Your beauty, you know; your grace, your charm. I had heard so much of them. So had Agrippa. Let me introduce you, by the way. Agrippa—Cleopatra. [*Wearily.*] As I was saying, it is *most* disappointing.

AGRIPPA.

[*Gruffly.*] Not what *I* expected at all!

[CHARMIAN *giggles furtively.*

CLEOPATRA.

[*Puzzled.*] You—don't admire me?

OCTAVIAN.

[*Gently.*] Admire you? My dear lady!

CLEOPATRA.

[*Bridling.*] Antony was of a different opinion.

AGRIPPA.

[*Bluntly.*] Antony was a fool.

OCTAVIAN.

Hush, my dear Agrippa! You hurt her feelings.

[AGRIPPA *shrugs his shoulders and crosses to* CHARMIAN, *with whom he begins a vigorous flirtation.*

CLEOPATRA.

[*Angrily.*] Never mind my feelings.

OCTAVIAN.

Frankly then, dear lady, we are not impressed. We came here prepared for a beautiful temptress, a dazzling siren whom I must resist or perish, something seductive, enticing. And what do we find?

CLEOPATRA.

[*Furious.*] Well, what *do* you find.

OCTAVIAN.

[*In his gentlest voice.*] Dear lady, don't let us pursue this painful subject. Probably we had not allowed for the flight of time. Suffice it that our poor hopes are unrealised. [*Looking round*] But I don't see Cæsarion.

CLEOPATRA.

[*Sullenly.*] My son is not here.

OCTAVIAN.

Another disappointment.

CLEOPATRA.

You wished to speak to him?

OCTAVIAN.

Yes. They talk of him as a son of Julius, don't they?

CLEOPATRA.

He *is* a son of Julius.

OCTAVIAN.

A sort of relation of mine, then? I must really make his acquaintance. Can you give me his address?

CLEOPATRA.

[*Sulkily.*] No. If you want him, you will have to find him for yourself.

OCTAVIAN.

[*Blandly.*] I shall find him, dearest Queen. You need be under no apprehensions about that.

CLEOPATRA.

Brute!

OCTAVIAN.

Eh?

CLEOPATRA.

Nothing. I was only thinking.

OCTAVIAN.

Never think *aloud*, dear lady. It's a dangerous habit.

CLEOPATRA.

[*Impatiently.*] Is there anything further you want with me?

OCTAVIAN.

[*Affably.*] Nothing, thank you, nothing. At least, nothing just now.

CLEOPATRA.

You would like to see me later?

OCTAVIAN.

[*Gentler than a sucking dove.*] In a few weeks, perhaps. The Triumph, you know. The sovereign people throwing up their caps and hallooing. The Procession up the Sacred Way, with the headsman at the end of it all. [*Yawning slightly.*] The usual thing.

CLEOPATRA.

[*Losing her temper.*] Oh, you're not a man at all! You're a block, a stone! You have no blood in your veins. You're not like Antony.

OCTAVIAN.

No, dear lady, I'm not like Antony. If I were, I shouldn't have beaten him at Actium.

CLEOPATRA.

I won't stay to be baited in this way. I won't! I won't!

[*Goes towards door.*

OCTAVIAN.

[*Gallantly.*] Farewell, then. We shall meet again. Agrippa, the Queen is going.

AGRIPPA.

[*Breaking off in the midst of his flirtation.*] Eh? Oh, good-bye.

CLEOPATRA.

[*Stamping her foot.*] Charmian!

[*Exit.*

[CHARMIAN *jumps up, kisses her hand to* AGRIPPA *and follows her mistress out.*

AGRIPPA.

[*Looking after her.*] That's a pretty little minx.

OCTAVIAN.

[*Who has seated himself wearily on the throne.*] Is she? I didn't notice . . . Cæsarion's fled.

AGRIPPA.

So I supposed.

OCTAVIAN.

It's a great nuisance. We must find him. Will you see about it?

AGRIPPA.

If you wish it. What shall I do with him?

OCTAVIAN.

[*In his tired voice.*] Better put him to death. It will save a lot of trouble in the end.

AGRIPPA.

But the boy's your own cousin.

OCTAVIAN.

Yes. I have always disliked my relations.

AGRIPPA.

[*Admiringly.*] I begin to think you *are* a genius, Cæsar, after all.

OCTAVIAN.

I *am*. Much good it does me! I'd give my genius for your digestion any day.

[*Leans back on throne and closes his eyes.*

[*Enter* CHARMIAN *hurriedly, looking pale and dishevelled.*

CHARMIAN.

Help! Help! The Queen is dying!

OCTAVIAN.

[*Irritably, opening his eyes.*] Stop that noise, girl! You make my head ache.

CHARMIAN.

She is dying, I tell you! She has taken poison!

[*Exit, squealing.*

AGRIPPA.

Poison, by Jove! Confound it, she mustn't do that, must she?

[*Is about to follow* CHARMIAN.

"I'd give my genius for your digestion any day."

OCTAVIAN.

Why not? It seems to me an excellent arrangement. Very thoughtful of her. Very thoughtful and considerate.

AGRIPPA.

But we want her for that Triumph of yours.

OCTAVIAN.

Never mind. After all, what *is* a Triumph? Disagreeable for her. A bore for us. Let her die now, by all means, if she prefers it.

AGRIPPA.

[*Impatiently.*] Don't *you* try and be magnanimous too. Leave that to your uncle. He did it better.

OCTAVIAN.

[*Wearily.*] My dear Agrippa, how stupid you are! What possible use can a quite plain and middle-aged lady be in a triumphal procession? If Cleopatra were still attractive I should say, "Save her, by all means." As she isn't, [*yawning*] I think we may let her die her own way without being charged with excessive magnanimity.

AGRIPPA.

[*Regretfully.*] Still I *should* have liked to have seen her brought to Rome.

OCTAVIAN.

Ah! I shall be quite contented to see her comfortably in her coffin in Egypt. We'll let her be buried beside Antony. It will gratify the Egyptians, and it won't hurt us. See to it, there's a good fellow.

[*Exit* AGRIPPA. OCTAVIAN *leans back, and falls asleep on the throne.*

A DRAMATIC PROLOGUE.

The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith.

Those persons who have seen Mrs. Patrick Campbell's magnificent performance in "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith" will have probably gone away with a quite false impression of the gentleman with whom Agnes Ebbsmith spent her eight years of married life. "For the first twelve months," she declares bitterly in the first act, "he treated me like a woman in a harem, for the rest of the time like a beast of burden." This is not quite just to poor Ebbsmith, who was a good sort of fellow in his commonplace way, and it is manifestly unfair that the audience should have no opportunity of hearing his side of the question. An attempt is made to remedy this injustice in the following Prologue, which all fair-minded persons are entreated to read before seeing Mr. Pinero's very clever play.

THE UNFORTUNATE MR. EBB-SMITH.

SCENE.—*The dining-room of the* EBBSMITHS' *house in West Kensington.* AGNES *and her husband are at breakfast. They have been married seven years. She looks much as we see her in the early acts of the play—gaunt, pale, badly dressed. He is a careworn man with hair slightly grey at the temples, an anxious forehead and sad eyes. He is glancing through the "Standard" in the intervals of eating his bacon. She is absorbed in the "Morning Screamer," one of the more violent Socialist-Radical organs of that day. Presently Ebbsmith looks up.*

EBBSMITH.

You won't forget, Agnes, that we are expecting people to dinner to-night?

AGNES.

[*Putting down her paper with an air of patient endurance.*] Eh?

EBBSMITH.

[*Mildly.*] I was saying, dear, if you will give me your attention for a moment, that I hoped you would not

forget that Sir Myles Jawkins and his wife and the Spencers and the Thorntons were dining here to-night.

AGNES.

[*Contemptuously.*] You seem very anxious that I should remember that *Lady* Jawkins is honouring us with her company!

EBBSMITH.

I only meant that I hoped you had told Jane about dinner. Last time the Jawkinses came you may recollect that you had omitted to order anything for them to eat, and when they arrived there was nothing in the house but some soup, a little cold mutton and a rice-pudding.

AGNES.

Very well [*returns to her paper.*]

EBBSMITH.

Thank you. And, Agnes, if you could manage to be dressed in time to receive them I should be very much obliged.

AGNES.

I?

EBBSMITH.

Of course. I suppose you will be here to entertain our guests?

AGNES.

Your guests, you mean.

EBBSMITH.

My dear Agnes, surely my guests are your guests also.

AGNES.

[*Breaking out.*] As long as the present unjust and oppressive marriage laws remain in force——

EBBSMITH.

[*Interrupting.*] I don't think we need go into the question of the alteration of the marriage laws.

AGNES.

Ah, yes. You always refuse to listen to my arguments on that subject. You know they are unanswerable.

EBBSMITH.

[*Patiently.*] I only meant that there would hardly be time to discuss the matter at breakfast.

AGNES.

[*Vehemently.*] A paltry evasion!

EBBSMITH.

Still, I assume that you will be here to receive our guests—my guests if you prefer it—to-night?

AGNES.

Do you make a point of always being at home to receive *my* guests?

EBBSMITH.

Those Anarchist people whom you are constantly asking to tea? Certainly not.

AGNES.

[*With triumphant logic.*] Then may I ask why I should be at home to receive the Jawkinses?

EBBSMITH.

My dear, you surely realise that the cases are hardly parallel. The only time I was present at one of your Revolutionary tea-parties the guests consisted of a Hyde Park orator who dropped his h's, a cobbler who had turned Socialist by way of increasing his importance in the eyes of the community, three ladies who were either living apart from their husbands or living with the husbands of other ladies, and a Polish refugee who had been convicted, quite justly, of murder. You cannot pretend to compare the Jawkinses with such people.

AGNES.

Indeed, I can. [*Rhetorically.*] In a properly organized Society——

EBBSMITH.

[*Testily.*] I really can't stop to re-organize Society now. I am due at my chambers in half-an-hour.

AGNES.

[*Sullenly.*] As you decline to listen to what I have to say, I may as well tell you at once that I shall *not* be at home to dinner to-night.

EBBSMITH.

[*Controlling his temper with an effort.*] May I ask your reason?

AGNES.

Because I have to be at the meeting of the Anti-marriage Association.

EBBSMITH.

Can't you send an excuse?

AGNES.

Send an excuse! Throw up a meeting called to discuss an important Public question because *you* have asked a few barristers and their wives to dine! You must be mad.

EBBSMITH.

Well, I must put them off, I suppose. What night next week will suit you to meet them? Thursday?

AGNES.

On Thursday I am addressing a meeting of the Society for the Encouragement of Divorce.

EBBSMITH.

Friday?

AGNES.

[*Coldly.*] Friday, as you know, is the weekly meeting of the Agamists' League.

EBBSMITH.

Saturday?

AGNES.

On Saturday I am speaking on Free Union for the People at Battersea.

EBBSMITH.

Can you suggest an evening?

AGNES.

[*Firmly.*] No. I think the time has come to make a stand against the convention which demands that a wife should preside at her husband's dinner-parties. It is an absurdity. Away with it!

EBBSMITH.

[*Alarmed.*] But, Agnes! Think what you are doing. You don't want to offend these people. Spencer and

"Friday, you know, is the meeting of the Agamists' League."

Thornton are useful men to know, and Jawkins puts a lot of work in my way.

AGNES.

[*With magnificent scorn.*] How like a man! And so *I* am to be civil to this Jawkins person because he "puts a lot of work in your way!"

EBBSMITH.

[*Meekly.*] Well, you know, my dear, I have to make an income somehow.

AGNES.

I would sooner starve than resort to such truckling!

EBBSMITH.

[*Gloomily.*] We are likely to do that, sooner or later, in any case.

AGNES.

What do you mean?

EBBSMITH.

[*Diffidently.*] Your—ahem!—somewhat subversive tenets, my love, are not precisely calculated to improve my professional prospects.

AGNES.

What have *I* to do with *your* prospects?

EBBSMITH.

The accounts of your meetings which appear in the newspapers are not likely to encourage respectable solicitors to send me briefs.

AGNES.

[*Indifferently.*] Indeed!

EBBSMITH.

Here's a report in to-day's *Standard* of a meeting addressed by you last night which would certainly not have that effect. Shall I read it to you?

AGNES.

If you wish it.

EBBSMITH.

[*Reads.*] "The meeting which was held in St. Luke's parish last night under the auspices of the Polyandrous Club proved to be of an unusually exciting description. The lecturer was Mrs. John Ebbsmith, wife of the well-known barrister of that name." [*Breaking off.*] Really, Agnes, I think *my* name need not have been dragged into the business.

AGNES.

Go on.

EBBSMITH.

"As soon as the doors were opened the place of meeting—the Iron Hall, Carter Street—was filled with a compact body of roughs assembled from the neighbouring streets, and there seemed every prospect of disorderly scenes. The appearance of Mrs. Ebbsmith on the platform was greeted with cheers and cries of 'Mad Agnes!'" Surely, my dear, you must recognise that my professional reputation is endangered when my wife is reported in the newspapers as addressing meetings in discreditable parts of London, where her appearance is greeted with shouts of 'Mad Agnes!'"

AGNES.

Nonsense! Who is likely to read an obscure paragraph like that?

EBBSMITH.

Obscure paragraph! My dear Agnes, the *Standard* has a leading article on it. Listen to this:—"Mrs. Ebbsmith's crusade against the institution of marriage is again attracting unfavourable attention. Last night in St. Luke's she once more attempted to ventilate her preposterous schemes . . . crack-brained crusade . . . bellowing revolutionary nonsense on obscure platforms . . . This absurd visionary, whom her audiences

not inappropriately nickname 'Mad Agnes' . . . Ultimately the meeting had to be broken up by the police . . . We cannot understand how a man in Mr. Ebbsmith's position can allow himself to be made ridiculous." [*Almost weeping.*] I do think they might leave *my* name out of it. In a leading article too!

AGNES.

Is there any more of the stuff?

EBBSMITH.

Another half column. Do, my dear, to oblige me, find some less ostentatious method of making known your views on the subject of marriage.

AGNES.

[*Anticipating a remark subsequently made by the* DUKE OF ST. OLPHERTS.] Unostentatious immodesty is not part of my programme.

EBBSMITH.

[*Humbly.*] Could you not, for my sake, consent to take a less *prominent* part in the movement?

AGNES.

[*Enthusiastically.*] But I want to be among the Leaders—the Leaders! That will be my hour.

EBBSMITH.

[*Puzzled.*] Your hour? I don't think I quite understand you.

AGNES.

There's only one hour in a woman's life—when she's defying her husband, wrecking his happiness and blasting his prospects. That is her hour! Let her make the most of every second of it!

EBBSMITH.

[*Wearily.*] Well, my dear, when it's over, you'll have the satisfaction of counting the departing footsteps of a ruined man.

AGNES.

Departing?

EBBSMITH.

Certainly. You and your crusade between them will have killed me. But I must go now. I ought to be at my chambers in ten minutes, and I must go round and make my excuses to Jawkins some time this morning. Tell Jane not to bother about dinner to-night. I shall dine at the Club. [*Exit.*

Curtain.

A DRAMATIZED VERSION.

The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám.

When it was announced recently in an English Daily Paper that a drama founded upon Fitzgerald's version of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám had been compounded in the United States, and would shortly be seen on the stage, many people may have wondered how it was done. It was done as follows :—

OMAR AND OH MY.

SCENE.—*Courtyard of the deserted palace of* JAMSHYD, *canopied by that inverted bowl commonly called the sky. To right, a tavern—not deserted. To left, a potter's house. At back, the grave of* BAHRÁM, *whence a sound of snoring proceeds. A wild ass stamps fitfully upon it. It is four o'clock in the morning, and the "false dawn" shows in the sky. In the centre of the stage stand a lion and a lizard, eyeing each other mistrustfully.*

LION.

Look here, do *you* keep these courts, or do I?

LIZARD.

[*Resentfully.*] I don't know. I believe we both keep them.

LION.

[*Sarcastically.*] *Do* you? Then I venture to differ from you.

LIZARD.

Perhaps you'd rather we took turns?

LION.

Oh, no, I wouldn't. I mean to have this job to myself.

[*He and the lizard close in mortal combat. After a gallant struggle the latter is killed, and the lion proceeds to eat him. Suddenly a shadowy form issues from the grave at back of stage.*

LION.

Bahrám, by Jove! Confound that jackass!

[*Bolts remains of lizard and then bolts himself, pursued by shadowy form.*

WILD ASS.

They said I couldn't wake him. But I knew better! Hee-haw! [*Exit in triumph.*]

[*A sound in revelry becomes noticeable from the tavern. A crowd gathers outside. The voice of* OMAR, *rather tipsy, is heard.*

OMAR.

When all the temple—hic!—is prepared within, why nods the lousy worshipper outside?

[*A cock crows, and the sun rises.*

CROWD.

[*Shouting in unison.*] Open then the door. You know

how little while we have to stay. And, once departed, goodness only knows when we shall get back again!

OMAR.

[*Opening the door and appearing unsteadily on the threshold.*] You can't come in. It's—hic—full.

[*Closes door again.*

CROWD.

I say, what rot!

[*Exeunt, depressed.*

NIGHTINGALE.

[*Jubilantly from tree.*] Wine! Wine! Red wine!

ROSE.

[*From neighbouring bush, much shocked.*] My dear, you don't know how your passion for alcohol shocks me.

NIGHTINGALE.

Oh yes I do. But every morning brings a thousand roses. After all, you're cheap. Jamshyd and I like our liquor, and plenty of it.

ROSE.

[*Shaking her head in disapproval.*] I've heard he drank deep.

NIGHTINGALE.

Of course he did. You should have seen him when Hátim called to supper! He simply went for it!

ROSE.

[*Blushing crimson.*] How dreadful!

NIGHTINGALE.

[*Contemptuously.*] I dare say. But you wouldn't be so red yourself if some buried Cæsar didn't fertilize your roots. Why, even the hyacinth's past isn't altogether creditable, and as for the grass—why, I could tell you things about the grass that would scare the soul out of a vegetable!

ROSE.

[*Annoyed.*] I'm not a vegetable.

NIGHTINGALE.

Well, well, I can't stay to argue with you. I've but a little time to flutter myself. [*Exit on the wing.*

[*Enter* OMAR *from tavern. He is by this time magnificently intoxicated and is leaning on the arm of a fascinating* SÁKI. *He has a jug of wine in his hand.*

OMAR.

[*Trying to kiss her.*] Ah, my beloved, fill the cup that clears to-day of past regrets and future fears. To-morrow! Why to-morrow I may be——

SÁKI.

[*Interrupting.*] I know what you're going to say. To-morrow you'll be sober. But you won't. *I* know you. Go home!

OMAR.

Home!—hic. What do I want with home? A book of verses underneath the bough, a jug of wine, a loaf of bread—no, no bread, two jugs of wine—and thou [*puts arm round her waist*] beside me singing like a bulbul.

[*Sings uproariously.*

For to-night we'll merry be!
For to-night——

SÁKI.

Fie! An old man like you!

OMAR.

Old! Thank goodness I *am* old. When I was young I went to school and heard the sages. Didn't learn much *there!* They said I came like water and went like wind. Horrid chilly Band-of-Hope sort of doctrine. I know better now.

[*Drinks from the jug in his hand.*

SÁKI.

[*Watching him anxiously.*] Take care. You'll spill it.

OMAR.

Never mind. It won't be wasted. All goes to quench some poor beggar's thirst down there [*points below*]. Dare say he needs it—hic.

SÁKI.

[*Shocked.*] How can you talk so!

OMAR.

[*Growing argumentative in his cups.*] I must abjure the balm of life, *I* must! I must give up wine for fear of—hic— What is it I'm to fear? Gout, I suppose. Not I!

[*Takes another drink.*

SÁKI.

[*Trying to take jug from him.*] There, there, you've had enough.

OMAR.

[*Fast losing coherence in his extreme intoxication.*] I want to talk to you about Thee and Me. That's what I want to talk about. [*Counting on his fingers.*] You see there's the Thee in Me and there's the Me in Thee. That's myshticism, that is. Difficult word to say, mysticishm. Must light lamp and see if I can't find it. Must be somewhere about.

"Myshticism, difficult word to say, mysticishm."

SÁKI.

You're drunk, that's what you are. Disgracefully drunk.

OMAR.

Of course I'm drunk. I am to-day what I was yesterday, and to-morrow I shall not be less. Kiss me.

SÁKI.

[*Boxing his ears.*] I won't have it, I tell you. I'm a respectable Sáki; and you're not to take liberties, or I'll leave you to find your way home alone.

OMAR.

[*Becoming maudlin.*] Don't leave me, my rose, my bullfinch—I mean bulbul. You know how my road is beset with pitfall—hic!—and with gin.

SÁKI.

[*Disgusted.*] Plenty of gin, *I* know. You never can pass a public-house.

OMAR.

[*Struck with the splendour of the idea.*] I say—hic!—let's fling the dust aside, and naked on the air of Heaven ride. It's shame not to do it!

[*Flings off hat, and stamps on it by way of preliminary.*

SÁKI.

[*Scandalised.*] If you take anything else off I shall call the police. [*Exit hurriedly.*

OMAR.

[*Terrified.*] Here, Sáki, come back. How am I to find my way without you? [*A pause.*] What's come to the girl? I only spoke—hic—meta—phorically. Difficult word to say, meta—phorically! [*Longer pause.*] How am I to get home? Can't go 'lone. Must wait for someone to come along. [*Peers tipsily about him.*] Strange, isn't it, that though lots of people go along here every day, not one returns to tell me of the road! Very strange. S'pose must sleep here . . . . S'pose——

[*Rolls into ditch and falls asleep.*

[*The curtain falls for a moment. When it rises again, day is departing and it is growing dark.* OMAR *is still in his ditch. The door of the potter's house, to the left of the stage, is open, the* POTTER *having betaken himself to the tavern opposite, and the pots within are arguing fiercely.*

FIRST POT.

Don't tell me I was only made to be broken. I know better.

SECOND POT.

Even a peevish boy wouldn't break *me!* The Potter would whack him if he did!

THIRD POT.

[*Of a more ungainly make.*] Depends on what he drank out of you.

SECOND POT.

What's that you say, you lopsided object?

THIRD POT.

That's right. Sneer at me! 'Tisn't my fault if the potter's hand shook when he made me. He was not sober.

FOURTH POT.

[*I think a Súfi pipkin.*] It's all very well to talk about pot and potter. What *I* want to know is, what did the pot call the kettle?

THIRD POT.

[*Grumbling.*] I believe my clay's too dry. That's what's the matter with *me!*

[*The moon rises. A step is heard without.*

SEVERAL POTS.

Hark, there's the potter! Can't you hear his boots creaking?

Enter POTTER *from tavern.*

POTTER.

[*Crossly.*] Shut up in there, or I'll break some of you

[*The pots tremble and are silent.*

POTTER.

[*Seeing Omar.*] Hullo. Come out of that. You're in *my* ditch. [*Lifts him into sitting posture by the collar.*]

OMAR.

[*Rubbing his eyes.*] Eh! What's that? Oh, my head! my head! [*Clasps it between his hands.*]

POTTER.

Get up! You've been drinking.

OMAR.

[*Dazed at his penetration.*] I wonder how you guessed that!

POTTER.

It's plain enough. You've been providing your fading life with liquor. I can see that with half an eye.

OMAR.

I have, I have. I've drowned my glory in a shallow cup, and my head's very bad.

POTTER.

You should take the pledge.

OMAR.

Oh! I've sworn to give up drink lots of times. [*Doubtfully.*] But was I sober when I swore? Tell me that.

POTTER.

[*Scratching his head.*] Dunnow.

OMAR.

[*Staggering to his feet.*] Would but the desert of the fountain yield one glimpse! In more prosaic language, could you get me something to drink? I'm rather star-scattered myself and the grass is wet.

[POTTER *goes to house and takes up third pot at random.*

THIRD POT.

[*Delighted.*] Now he's going to fill me with the old familiar juice!

[POTTER *fills him with water and returns to* OMAR.

THIRD POT.

[*Disgusted.*] Water! Well, I'm dashed!

OMAR.

Many thanks, O Sáki. Here's to you. [*Drains beaker.*] Ugh! don't think much of your liquor. I wish the moon wouldn't look at me like that. She's a beastly colour. Why doesn't she look the other way?

POTTER.

[*Sarcastically.*] Wants to see *you*, I suppose.

OMAR.

[*Darkly.*] Well, some day she won't. That's all. Farewell, O Sáki. Yours is a joyous errand. But I wish you had put something stronger in the glass [*Handing it back to him.*] Turn it down, there's a good fellow. [*Exit.*

THE END.

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